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## Fourth world consumer culture: Emerging consumer cultures in remote Aboriginal communities of North-Western Australia

Ronald George Groves  
*Edith Cowan University*

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# **FOURTH WORLD CONSUMER CULTURE**

**EMERGING CONSUMER CULTURES  
IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES  
OF NORTH-WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**from**

**Edith Cowan University**

**by**

**Ronald George Groves, BEc. MBA (UWA)**

**School of Marketing, Tourism and Leisure**

**1999**

# ABSTRACT

Over the two centuries since the arrival of European settlers in Australia, the material culture and lifestyle of the indigenous Aboriginal people of Australia has undergone dramatic change. Based on qualitative fieldwork in three remote Aboriginal communities in north-western Australia, this study examines the emergence of unique consumer cultures that appear to differ significantly from mainstream Australia and indeed from other societies. The study finds that the impact of non-indigenous goods and external cultural values upon these communities has been significant. However, although anthropologists feared some fifty years ago that Aboriginal cultural values and traditions had been destroyed, this study concludes that they are still powerful moderating forces in each of the communities studied. The most powerful are non-possessiveness, immediacy in consumption, and a strong sharing ethos. Unlike findings in the so-called Second and Third Worlds, these Fourth World consumer cultures have not developed an unquenchable desire for manufactured consumer goods. Instead, non-traditional consumption practices have been modified by tradition oriented practices. The consumer cultures that have emerged through a synthesis of global and local values and practices have involved Aboriginal adoption, adaption and resistance practices. This process has resulted in both positive and negative impacts on the Aboriginal people of these communities. Ways of dealing with the negative effects have been suggested, while the positive effects have been highlighted as examples of what can possibly be learned from Aboriginal culture. The study also finds differences between the emerging consumer cultures of each community, concluding that this can be attributed to historical and cultural differences. The main conclusion is that the development of a global consumer culture is by no means inevitable.

# DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Although anthropologists have studied Australian Aborigines since the earliest years of European settlement, historians have neglected Aboriginal history until recently. Even now, the majority of Aboriginal history is concerned with the conflicts arising from the settlement of Australia by Europeans and the process of Aboriginal resistance and adaption to European cultural practices. One of the neglected areas in this history has been the impact of European consumer goods. While Aboriginal adoption of these goods is well documented, there is little written on Aboriginal responses to imposed consumption practices or the manner in which such goods were adapted or resisted. This has become even more relevant as global consumer cultures impact upon rural Aboriginal communities. The diffusion of cultural globalism has been enhanced by mass communication, which has reduced the isolation of communities but not their physical remoteness.

The evolution of consumer culture within Europe and America has been increasingly researched over the last decade, as has the impact of global consumer culture on developing 'Third World' countries and on Second World countries in the wake of the collapse of Soviet communism. What is beginning to emerge is that, despite significant similarities between consumer cultures, there are also significant differences that are attributable to specific cultural and historical factors.

The present study attempts to describe and interpret emerging consumer cultures within three remote Aboriginal communities of north western Australia. Each of these communities has a strong affiliation with the sea with two being in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and the third in the adjoining Arnhem land region of the Northern Territory. The study describes the ways in which European consumption practices have been accommodated; the forces that have imposed change; how imposed consumption practices that conflicted with Aboriginal cultural values have been resisted and adapted; and the unique consumer cultures that have emerged as a result of cultural interactions.

The study is important because of the increasingly limited number of remote Fourth World communities that retain cultural values and tradition-oriented practices that differ from those of the dominant society. Consequently, there is limited opportunity to study the interactions between tradition-oriented consumption practices and the cultural values and consumption behaviours introduced through the economic and political power of dominant societies.

The research evolved from an earlier research project, involving a team of seventeen people, conducted in the Kimberley region of Western Australia during 1993. Since then, the author has visited further sites with smaller teams. On each occasion, qualitative field work methods were employed to record observations and informant comments using audio and video equipment.

The study uses only data collected when the author was present. Limitations of the study include the brevity of the time spent at the sites, some fifty days over seven visits, and the fact that neither seasonal variations in consumption practices, nor celebratory events, were fully observed. However, triangulation across data created by team members, multiple visits to sites and the distinct cultural and historical differences between sites enabled a balanced description and interpretation to be obtained.

As the focus of the study involves a cultural perspective on consumption behaviour, the following chapter introduces the concept of culture and the creation of cultural meaning, followed by a review of the literature on the historical development of consumer culture and the emergence and impact of cultural globalisation. The tradition-oriented cultural practices within the three Aboriginal communities, prior to European settlement, are discussed in Chapter Three. This is followed by an examination of the impact of imposed European goods and cultural practices.

The fourth chapter describes the research methodologies employed and provides an historical account and contemporary description of the three sites studied. The following two chapters relate the findings of the study. Chapter five outlines consumption practices related to the consumption of food, housing and household goods, fashion and personal objects and the pursuit of leisure time activities. The sixth chapter looks at the more negative aspects of the emerging consumer culture, those associated with gambling activities and the consumption of alcohol. The concluding chapter summarises these findings, outlining particularly the unique features of the consumer cultures evolving in the remote Aboriginal communities of north western Australia.

## Endnotes

1. These terms are defined by Nelson Graburn (1976) as: *First World* being those industrialised countries operating under a capitalist system of production and resource allocation; *Second World* being those countries utilising a central government control; *Third World* those countries yet to undergo the full process of industrialisation; and *Fourth World* those people who inhabit their own land but whose economic and political future is largely determined by a dominant and alien cultural group.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION

*Can it have merely been by coincidence that the future was to belong to the societies fickle enough to care about changing the colours, materials and shapes of costume, as well as the social order and the map of the world - societies that is, which were ready to break with their traditions? There is a connection (Braudel 1973, p. 323).*

This chapter serves two purposes. The first is to introduce the concepts upon which the current study is based. These are derived from anthropology, sociology and history but are relatively new to consumer behaviour. These concepts are described, then linked, to provide a contextual framework for the present study. This framework is needed to understand how consumer culture has developed within remote fourth world communities subjected to cultural traditions of a dominant society, as well as a global cultural system. The chapter's second purpose is to review the relevant literature to identify concepts that merit further investigation.

The focus of this study is a cultural perspective of the consumption behaviours within three isolated and culturally diverse communities, following a century of imposed changes to their consumption patterns and cultural traditions. For this reason it is important to understand the concept of culture, as well as the relationship between culture and the consumption of material things. The first section of the chapter develops a definition of culture for the purposes of this study. It should be stressed that culture is not so much a property of society as a process by which meanings are created and interpreted. Nor is culture static. Rather, it is constantly changing, thus allowing for a continual synthesis of old and new. It will be seen that the concept of culture is a conundrum; elusive rather than illusive, divisive rather than directive; and a complexity of ideas, rather than a comprehensive, single concept.

The second section of the chapter focuses on the way in which consumer goods are infused with cultural meanings, examining how the meanings of a good differ across cultures, and how these meanings may be used to express individuality and social belonging. The third section is the most important part of the chapter, describing the concept of consumer culture and the central roles played by material possessions and consumer desires. This section also describes the historical factors that enabled the emergence of consumer culture, firstly in England and then within Europe, Asia and the Americas. This provides an understanding of the cultural and historical differences and of the emerging consumer cultures within the three communities studied. The theories proposed to explain and predict economic development are discussed in the fourth section of the chapter. This enables a better understanding of the policies implemented by governments to deal with perceived problems within remote Australian Aboriginal communities. These theories have since been criticised on a number of fronts and may appear naive in retrospect, especially when considering the economic, political and cultural impacts



of Globalism that are the subject of section five. This section is most concerned, however, with the ramifications of the emerging global cultural system. The final section of the chapter describes the impact of the global cultural system on a number of developing countries, looking at the conflicts that have arisen within local cultures and their methods of adoption, adaption and resistance. This provides a basis for considering the different ways in which the people of the remote Aboriginal communities have reacted to the same forces, as well as the similarity of their responses.

## 2.1 THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

Williams (1976) described culture as one of the most important concepts in modern society, yet one of the most complicated to define. This is partly because of the intricate historical development of the concept, but also because of the different usage within distinct and often incompatible philosophies. Williams outlined three broad uses for the term culture within Western thinking: firstly, as an independent abstract noun describing the process of intellectual, spiritual and physical development; secondly, as an independent noun indicating a particular way of life; and thirdly, as an applied abstract noun describing intellectual and artistic activity.

In its early use in the English language culture was used as a noun of process, relating to agricultural cultivation and animal husbandry. During the sixteenth century, this was extended through metaphor to describe the cultivation of the human mind. This use remained widespread until the late eighteenth century, at which time the English and French adopted the term culture as a synonym for civilisation or the process of human development, involving the refinement of manners and the etiquette of polite behaviour. Cultured or civilised society was considered to be the antipathy of uncivilised 'primitive societies'.

German intellectuals, however, used the term *Kultur* to distinguish the scholarly achievements of intellectuals in science, philosophy and the arts from what they regarded as the frivolous refinements and social graces of the 'civilised' bourgeois class. This eighteenth century German use found further expression in the emerging discipline of cultural history, where it denoted the improvement and ennoblement of human faculties. Thompson (1990) described these eighteenth century views as the 'classical conception of culture,' noting that they involved processes to develop and ennoble the human faculties through the assimilation of works of scholarship and art.

Following the minimalising of theological explanations of existence, it was considered that human beings, rather than a supreme creator, were central to the explanation of human progress (Boas 1940). Coincidentally, imperial expansion brought Europeans into contact with beings similar to themselves in form, yet with seemingly different beliefs and behaviours. The prevailing European view was that these uncivilised people or 'savages' were immoral, almost non-human beings (Keesing 1976). In opposition to this thinking, French philosopher Rousseau (1755) introduced the concept of 'the noble savage'; happy, carefree children of nature, unencumbered with the cares imposed by civilisation. One effect of Rousseau's view was the initiation of a debate on the shortcomings of the 'civilised' European way of life.

This conception of culture goes some way, perhaps, to explaining the demeaning descriptions of the 'primitive savages' encountered by eighteenth century European explorers. Indigenous peoples in the newly discovered lands were often reported as 'uncivilised' or being 'without culture'. British navigator James Cook, for example, when describing the Australian Aborigines in his journals of 1788 wrote, "they did not even live in societies, but like other animals were scattered about along the coasts and in the woods" (Cited in Stanner 1979, p.

156). Because their behaviour did not conform to contemporary European thinking, the indigenous inhabitants of Australia were often regarded as lacking in logic and rationality. Eurocentric thinking of the time appeared incapable of accepting that the Australian Aboriginal possessed any culture at all.

With the emergence of anthropology, the concept of culture became less concerned with the ennoblement of the European mind and more with the customs and behavioural patterns of the inhabitants of societies 'discovered' during Europe's exploration and colonial expansion. Scholars at this time attempted to understand why European society had reached an apex of 'civilisation,' while other societies remained in states of 'savagery' or 'barbarity'.

Edward Tylor (1832-1917), generally considered the founder of British anthropology, made no distinction between culture and civilisation, describing human development as a gradual progression. Tylor was not so much interested in European values as in how they had come about and, more particularly, how those who were lacking values could attain them (Young 1995). In addressing this concern, he provided the first English language definition of the concept of culture:

*Culture, or civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes, knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor 1871, cited in Young 1995, p. 45).*

Consistent with the scientific methodology of his day, Tylor viewed the study of culture as a process for dissecting society into its component parts, enabling systematic comparison and classification in much the same manner as biologists and zoologists classified and catalogued flora and fauna. In accordance with the contemporary scientific studies of Charles Darwin, Tylor viewed cultural change as a process of gradual evolution.

The evolutionists envisaged a continuum of cultural progress, commencing with 'savages,' who possessed limited intellectual ability and represented living examples of the earliest ancestors. With the gradual evolution of mental and moral powers, they argued, humans progressed, by way of a series of inventions and discoveries, through 'barbarism' to eventual 'civilisation.'

Franz Boas, using first hand experience with indigenous Americans, disputed the speculative theories of evolutionists such as Tylor and considered contemporary anthropology to be too historical and evolutionary theory to be too narrow. He argued that social development varied between cultures and rejected the concept of a general social progression. Boas also denounced suggestions of racial superiority arguing that:

*I often ask myself what advantages our "good society" possesses over that of the "savages". The more I see their customs, the more I realise that we have no right to look down on them (Cited in Langness 1975, p.45).*

Boas believed that cultural theory must be based upon specific and detailed ethnographic data and that culture was not merely the product of an individual mind but a of group structure with its own logic. He defined his concept of culture as:

*...the totality of the mental and physical reactions and attitudes that characterise the behaviour of individuals composing a social group collectively and individually in relation to their natural environment, to other groups, to members of the group itself and of each individual to himself (Boas 1940, p.159).*

Throughout the twentieth century, cultural theory developed and evolved through a series of complex paradigm shifts beyond the scope of this study. However, a brief historical summary of functionalism, cultural materialism,

structuralism and symbolism' are outlined to enable a distinction to be made between the two broad conceptual streams of cultural theory used in this study.

The historical approach of evolutionist theory was gradually supplanted by functionalism, which attempted to create a science of anthropology rather than a branch of history. Bronislaw Malinowski (1913, 1926), generally regarded as the founder of intensive ethnographic field work, was the foremost proponent of functionalist theories, in which customs were considered a direct expression of human needs. Malinowski's work initiated a paradigm shift marked by careful data collection and evaluation following 'in situ' participation with native informants. Using detailed empirical studies from small scale societies, he attempted to demonstrate how the various elements of a culture (such as rites, customs, kinship patterns, social and political organisation, land tenure, tools, artefacts, religion and magic) contributed to a unified and consistent cultural whole. Each functional component, he believed, fulfilled the biological, psychological and social needs of humans. To Malinowski, contextualising these functional components was essential to cultural interpretation.

Cultural materialists, on the other hand, conceptualised culture as being constructed by ecological, biological, economic and political determinants external to culture itself. Karl Marx focused on toolpower and human labour to ensure material well being and the ability of human beings to modify culture through their own efforts.

Julian Steward (1955) emphasised ecology as the major determining influence upon the evolution of culture, arguing that underlying ecological conditions caused similar cultural responses across different technologies and environments. Leslie White (1949) stated that culture existed independent of the human mind, with humans being simply carriers of cultural tradition. He concluded that culture and

cultural change could not be explained in terms of actions determined by the human mind.

Steward and White both emphasised the etic rather than the emic<sup>2</sup> perspective and each downplayed the role of the individual in cultural change. White, who focused on the complexity and adaptability of cultures, denied his theories were different in principle from the Evolutionist views proposed by Tylor. Steward, however, focused on adaptability to environmental change and termed his theories 'multi-Evolutionism' to distinguish them from nineteenth century Evolutionism, which he believed to be too narrow. Cultures, he argued, had evolved along quite different lines and, therefore, Tylor's all encompassing general theory was not possible.

Perhaps the most widely adopted concept within cultural materialism theory is the cultural triad proposed by Marvin Harris (1971). His classification comprises three functional components of culture: an ecological component, providing the infrastructure for culture; a sociological component, providing the structure; and an ideological component, providing the superstructure. The ecological component, he argued, enables the adaption of cultures to their environments and is shaped by the technology utilised to obtain, transform and distribute resources. The sociological function involves the maintenance of orderly social relationships, enabling efficient production, consumption and the exchange of resources, none of which could be satisfactorily conducted in isolation. Finally, the ideological function comprises all socially patterned thought; cognitive, existential, moral, aesthetic, and evaluative. This cultural ideology enables society to control its ecology and social organisation, create shared understanding and allocate meaning to both experiences and symbolic forms.

The major criticism leveled at cultural materialism is that it is too restrictive, explaining culture solely in behavioural terms. While some cultural materialists acknowledge the role of psychological phenomena, such as the ability of humans to symbolise, they emphasise environmental impacts upon individuals as being more significant than individual impact upon the environment.

The main creator of structuralism was the French philosopher Émile Durkheim (1859/1938), who reacted against both evolutionist theory and the materialist theory of Marx and also disputed the value of psychological reductionism. To Durkheim, the fate of mankind was dictated by social structure and he analysed society in terms of its component institutions, such as family and religion, together with the functions<sup>3</sup> they performed. Traditional societies, he believed, followed a pattern of rules established through custom and based upon shared meanings, values and social norms. Durkheim termed this the 'conscience collective' and believed that it disappeared following the division of labour and the specialisation associated with modernisation. This collective was seen to be replaced by the external constraints of the production and legal systems, thus diverting society from group solidarity toward selfish self interest, in what he termed 'the cult of the individual.'

Historically, Claude Levi-Strauss (1946) also belonged to the structuralist school but differed from Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, both of whom asserted that there can be a science of society but not a science of culture. Levi-Strauss moved beyond sociology and into the realm of psychology, which Durkheim had found abhorrent. He was, however, influenced by the work of Durkheim's nephew, Marcel Mauss (1954), who emphasised the psychological concepts of motive, obligation and the meaning of gift giving, particularly that involving reciprocity.

Extending upon the concept of generalised reciprocity in gift giving proposed by Mauss, Levi-Strauss included the exchange of women as well as associated kinship and incest taboos. He believed that there were universal and fundamental 'structures of the mind' that determined human behaviour. Like the earlier evolutionists, he considered that an analysis of primitive society may explain how this development came about, although, unlike the evolutionists, he saw no essential difference between primitive and contemporary minds. Barrett (1984) argued that structuralist theories had had their 'day in the sun' and especially criticised the theories of Levi-Strauss, arguing that his 'mentalist approach' was too divorced from social organisation.

Symbolic anthropologists view humans as a distinctively symbol-producing and symbol-using species (Geertz 1973). For them, the meaning of a symbol is not derived from its intrinsic physical properties but from the arbitrary imposition of humans. The inherent value of symbols is bestowed by those who use them. In effect, the world in which people live comprises symbols of their own making (Coser and Rosenberg 1982).

Clifford Geertz, the major figure associated with Symbolic Anthropology, was critical of earlier concepts of culture, stating that the discipline as it stood required a more powerful concept to replace the holistic approach which obscured more than it revealed. Citing Weber's view that man is suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, Geertz added:

*I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz 1973, p. 4).*



Geertz conceptualised culture as humanity's most important instrument of adaptation, as opposed to the Darwinian concept of cultural change through natural selection. Undirected by cultural patterns, Geertz argued, man's behaviour would become a series of chaotic acts and exploding emotions. He described culture as the accumulated totality of human behavioural patterns and an essential condition for human existence. He emphasised that marriage was more than simply a ceremony; it was a set of notions about what men and women are like, how they should treat each other and who should marry whom. Being human he added was:

*...not just to breathe, but control it, not just to talk but to utter the appropriate words and phases in the appropriate social situations and in the appropriate tone of voice. It is not just to eat but to prefer certain foods in certain ways and to follow rigid etiquette. (Geertz 1967, p. 53)*

Geertz argued that culture comprised a set of symbols by which humans conferred significance upon their experiences. Rather than inherited traditions and subconscious language patterns, he regarded meanings as public and observable, embedded in behaviour and as agents of social change. Individuals constructed reality from their social experiences then used this to create purposeful social change. Neither did Geertz endorse the highly cognitive concept of culture proposed by the structuralists, arguing that the human ability to think, to abstract and to respond emotionally to experiences, was closely linked to culturally proscribed and shared meanings; for:

*A child counts on his fingers before he 'counts in his head'; he feels love on his skin before he feels it 'in his heart'. Not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artefacts in man. (Geertz 1973, p.81)*

Geertz further argued that it was the human ability to symbolise, or construct images in the mind and conceptually distinguish and convey their meaning through language, that differentiated humans from other animals. It was this ability that enabled intellectual interpretation and the development of culture. Geertz also contended that each society, must be analysed on its own terms. He rejected the notion of universal rationality proposed by Levi-Strauss as simply an evolutionary extension of Rousseau's 'noble savage,' arguing that each culture is different and must be considered as having a unique way of seeing the world. Thompson considered Geertz's concept of culture to be the most important to emerge from the anthropological literature. He defined it as:

*... the pattern of meaning embodied in symbolic form, including actions, utterances and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs (Geertz 1990, p. 132).*

Bohannan (1995) also believed that meanings in one cultural tradition are likely to be different in another culture. This results in both cognitive dissonance; a conflict of meaning within individuals, and cultural dissonance; the conflict of meaning between people of different cultural traditions. Because the basic meanings of objects and actions are interpreted differently within different cultural traditions, cultural dissonance results in misinterpretation, a lack of understanding and mistrust.

In summary, culture may be conceptualised either as the 'whole way of life of a society' or as 'the production and communication of shared meanings within a society.' The first understanding recognises culture as a body of beliefs and practices that regulate social life, providing a means of understanding, structuring and describing the social relationships that constitute human living. The second

recognises culture as a framework for allocating meaning to objects and actions. Both concepts are relevant to this study.

The 'whole of life' conceptualisation of culture also recognises that, while cultures differ from each other, they have common features that provide internal consistency. For the purposes of the present study, the 'whole of life' concept of culture may be thought to include five components, namely (1) a body of shared beliefs that enable allocation of meaning to objects and actions (2) a body of shared values and behavioural norms enabling judgements about and regulation of food and dress codes, social relationships and behavioural patterns which are associated with life events such as birth, marriage and death (3) a set of customs, rituals, myths and traditions by which society members may express these shared beliefs values, behaviours experiences and emotions (4) a cosmology that enables an understanding of the culture's origins, together with stories related to its struggles, failures, achievements and aspirations as well as its associated heroes and villains, and (5) a shared set of rewards and punishments that encourage maintenance of the cultural system.

Distinct cultures often overlap and share common cultural practices but usually differ in the ideological justification for these practices. Alternatively, while cultures share a common ideology, they often contain subcultural groups whose variations in beliefs, values and cultural practices differ from mainstream society. Examples include homosexual groups, religious groups, and age cohorts. Such subcultural groupings may lead to social conflict within mainstream society or to the development of mechanisms for coping with contested differences.

The alternative conceptualisation of culture, as 'the production and communication of shared meanings', necessitates the allocation of meaning through signs, symbols and language. These are termed cultural signifiers. Meanings are

not by themselves inherent in goods, but created and encoded by the producers and users of goods. This process requires the use of interconnected semantic networks of knowledge by individuals and consensual agreement on meanings among members of society. This process of meaning allocation is considered in the following section.

## 2.2 THE MEANING OF THINGS

Consumption is generally conceptualised as acquiring, using or disposing of goods and services (Jacoby 1978). These activities, and the goods associated with them, are devoid of meaning until consumers with specific objectives assign them meaning. This conferral of meaning occurs within a cultural context and is based upon the assumption that certain values will be realised, or certain outcomes will result from, the possession, use or disposal of consumer goods. Consumers culturally frame the perceived attributes of goods within the set of outcomes they assume will occur. Therefore, the meanings attached to consumer goods and activities differ between individuals and across cultures, depending upon the assumptions made by those within a culture.

Objects and events do not, and cannot, make sense by themselves. Rather, cognition and social discourse is required for the allocation of meaning. As Hall (1997, p. 221) notes, meaning arises, not from things in themselves (reality) but from the language games and classifying systems into which they are inserted. This involves the use of cognitive representations of objects and actions stored in memory as associative semantic networks. Individuals use these networks as a framework for allocating meaning. The use of an interpretive framework to encode and decode objects and actions with meaning is termed signification (Woodward 1998).

In contemporary societies, signifiers are increasingly audio and visual images communicated through electronic and print media and commercial hoardings rather than language. In effect, the means of producing, circulating and exchanging culture has been dramatically expanded through media technology and the information revolution of the late twentieth century (Thompson 1998), enabling individuals to allocate similar meanings to things. This shared social meaning is similar to what Durkheim referred to a century ago as 'collective representation.'

While consumer goods play a central role in contemporary societies, their cultural significance is explained not only by utility but also by their ability to communicate cultural meanings. The contemporary world is filled with meanings that are created and transferred through consumer goods (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; McCracken 1988). Many of these goods are acquired and infused with value because they provide pleasure, or give meaning, to people's lives (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Appadurai 1986).

Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) contend that individuals use possessions as markers that denote character, to remind themselves of who they are, as symbols of security, as expressions of self identity, and to determine the status of others. Where uniqueness or individuality is preferred to conventionality, objects are employed to distinguish this individuality. At the same time, objects are also used to integrate individuals into groups (Bellah et al 1985).

The importance of consumer goods as social markers and in the shaping of culture has been advocated by McCracken (1988), who considers goods to be integral components of the cultural scaffolding of present day realities. Societies, he stated, attach meanings to goods for pragmatic purposes, helping distinguish between gender, age and status. Product development and design, advertising, and fashion enable both individual and collective self definition. Consumer goods, often

viewed as the unhappy playthings of a materialist society, also create and maintain the order that ensures cultural survival.

Baudrillard (1988) considered consumer goods to have assumed a place of significance in contemporary societies, transforming the material world into a symbolic world. The everyday meaning of objects is altered according to the ideology of the consumer. Belk (1988a) went further, noting that consumer goods are no longer perceived simply as functional objects (eg. the clothing we wear, the cars we drive, the homes we occupy and the objects we use to decorate them) because all are infused with symbolic properties. Consumer goods serve as indicators of individuality and embodiments of style, communicating the presence or absence of taste and status. They define who we are, what we are and what we desire to become. They summon up a range of feelings and desires.

Both Sahlins (1990) and Belk (1984) observed that modern societies leave aspects of their cultures underspecified, thus enabling consumers to assign individual meaning. Sahlins (1990) extended the distinction between material and symbolic meaning, arguing that the social meaning of an object is no more apparent from its physical properties than is the value that may be assigned through economic exchange. The reason Americans consider dogs 'inedible' and deem cattle 'food' is no more perceptible to the senses than it is a reflection of the price of the meat. Citing Levi-Strauss's (1964) suggestion that the cultural significance of totemism had largely disappeared, Sahlins questioned whether modern society had not replaced totemism with manufactured objects infused with symbolic codes that communicated membership of social groups. At the same time, he also argued that these objects can be used for individual differentiation. For Baudrillard (1988), on the other hand, modern consumers have become the vehicles for expressing the difference between objects.

While consumer goods are undoubtedly powerful change agents in contemporary society, they also provide consistency during periods of social change. Douglas and Isherwood (1979) suggest that people acquire goods for material welfare, psychic welfare and competitive display. Goods are used by individuals in each of these instances to make a statement about either 'their self' or 'their social relationships.' In other words, consumer goods possess meanings expressing both a sense of belonging and a sense of individual identity or distinction. McCracken (1988) extended this, arguing that the meanings of goods are constantly changing within each society's culturally constituted world. What then are the processes by which these cultural and symbolic meanings are created and interpreted?

Tharpe and Scott (1990) suggested eight aspects of cultural meaning that might be attributed to material objects. They noted that many objects can be placed in more than one category and that the meaning attached to objects varies between individuals, between cultures and over time. Their eight categories are:

- **Ancestral totems**

Objects can be valued as statements of ethnicity or kinship. Examples include a national costume, a lock of baby hair or a family heirloom.

- **Social status markers**

Goods can designate belonging to, or being separated from, social groups. Wedding rings, stethoscopes, executive briefcases and police uniforms are examples.

- **Interpersonal media**

These are mediating goods that facilitate communication and set the stage for social interaction. They may include a bunch of roses or a birthday card. Belk (1988a) suggested such interpersonal exchanges embody both the self concept of the giver and the perceived tastes of the receiver and, therefore, perpetuate relationships through implicit obligation.

- **Self expression goods**

These closely reflect the ideal self but possess private and public meaning. Examples include emblems of achievement or admiration, such as sporting trophies and posters, or signposts for future development, such as an exercise bike.

- **Experiential memoirs**

Objects can act as mementos, as nostalgic reminders of past experiences, and assist individuals to make sense of life's experiences. Wedding and travel photos and souvenirs, such as T-shirts, exemplify this category.

- **Utility goods**

Goods can be valued primarily for function and performance. Dishwashers and lawn mowers are examples. This aspect provides the underlying focus of the 'rational' buyer but it seems that few goods are allocated meaning for this purpose alone. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) suggest that items such as spears and knives, that have utilitarian value in primitive societies, often take on significance as symbols of manhood as well. When acquired by tourists, they became experiential memoirs.



- **Pleasure giving**

Objects can be infused with aesthetic and sensual properties that elicit hedonistic pleasures of fantasy, feeling or fun (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). These may include artworks, a bottle of burgundy or a Pavrotti opera recording. Items regarded as either health risks or associated with crime, such as tobacco, alcohol and drugs, are also included in this category. Tharpe and Scott (1990) suggest that the values intrinsic in pleasure-giving objects may clash with a prevailing cultural value system. Social advertisements, they claim, address the inherent dangers in consuming these objects but often fail to acknowledge the pursuit of pleasure.

- **Transcendence objects**

Such objects are used to transcend the limits of an individual's existence. While traditionally achieved through religion and associated icons, individuals in modern societies seek secular artefacts for this purpose (McCracken 1987b). Marketers have also, in some instances, commercialised the transcendental curios of developing nations, removing their magical meaning and turning them into experiential memoirs.

Gottdiener (1985) investigated a three way relationship in creating meaning, arguing that analysis of meaning should involve consumer goods, those who consume them and marketing intermediaries. While agreeing that consumer goods range from utilitarian objects to hedonistic, pleasure-seeking experiences, his three way relationship focuses explicitly on symbolic meanings and the social interactions in which these were created, communicated and interpreted.

Gottdiener (1985) based symbolic meanings on the exchange of messages through a systems of signs determined by consumers and transferred by social

groups. Meaning allocation, he argued, was explained by transfunctionalisation, whereby consumer goods have both a functional use and a socially sustained second order meaning. He cited an automobile used functionally to travel but also having a second order meaning through status conferral. To understand consumer society, we must understand this process of transfunctionalisation, which involves the production and control of meaning through the identification of cultural codes. These codes are used by society for the signification of goods and the establishment of a meaningful relationship between goods and consumers.

The term 'mass market' was a misnomer, stated Gottdiener, as contemporary societies comprise an aggregation of heterogeneous social groups and subcultures, each pursuing their own lifestyle. Consumers are members of a number of groups, including religious, ethnic and age specific groups, with material objects assuming a multiplicity of meanings derived through social interaction. In the three way process of allocating symbolic meaning, producers assign goods an exchange value in order to facilitate sale, consumers allocate a use value, and subcultures a status value. Gottdiener exemplified a raincoat that may have value in relation to price, provide functional protection from rain, and be an indicator of potential weather conditions, as well as a statement of fashion.

Denzin (1992, p. XIV), also focused on the symbolic relationship between people and goods, noting:

*First, human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them; second, the meanings of things arise out of the process of social interaction; and third meanings are modified through an interpretive process which involves self-reflective individuals symbolically interacting with one another.*

McCracken (1988), on the other hand, describes the fundamental coordinates of meaning as cultural categories, segmenting communities according to class, status, gender, age and occupation. Cultural categories are dynamic, subject to constant and rapid change, and substantiated through material objects. He cites the use of clothing to distinguish between men and women, pointing out that meanings of 'delicacy' for women and 'strength' for men are communicated through clothing. Material goods are more revealing than language and are both the creations and the creators of the 'culturally constituted world.' There is little cultural meaning that does not find expression in material culture.

McCracken (1988) also argues that the transfer of meaning from this culturally constituted world to goods can be through the properties implicit in advertising images. He emphasises that, while the observer is the final author in the process of meaning transfer, advertising is the conduit through which cultural meaning flows. The fashion system is an even more complex instrument of meaning transfer through celebrities and opinion leaders, people who are held in high esteem by virtue of their beauty, accomplishment or social status.

While rituals are often verbal, such as greetings or prayers, they are more effective when associated with visible material goods (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). McCracken (1988) uses four consumption rituals (possession, exchange, grooming and divestment) to explain the transfer of meaning from consumer goods to their users. These rituals, he claims, provide an opportunity to affirm, evoke, assign, and revise cultural meanings.

Possession rituals involve collecting, comparing, discussing and flaunting possessions, as well as behaviours such as the cleaning of a previously occupied dwelling or personalising new belongings to render them symbolically individual. Grooming rituals include the commodification of an otherwise impersonal material

object to add a meaning that reflects individual or social identity. Individuals 'coax out' meanings from objects to reinforce their identity and provide confidence, aggressive powers, or as a means of defence (McCracken 1988). Sometimes the good itself is groomed to cultivate meaningful properties, such as the energy and time lavished on an automobile (Myers 1985). At the other extreme, persons who are dying may attempt to "de-cathect" or remove emotional significance from valued possessions (McCracken 1988). Likewise, the exchange of gifts enables the meaningful properties inherent in a good to be transferred to the recipient as part of the meaning of the exchange. Gifts then assist in the definition of relationships between giver and receiver. The giving of objects on ritual occasions, like birthdays, anniversaries and special occasions such as Valentines Day, acts as a powerful means of interpersonal communication. Finally, divestment rituals remove meanings. When acquiring a material good, for example, divestment rituals remove the meanings associated with the previous owner, thus avoiding contamination of the extended self. When disposing of a material good, on the other hand, the meanings attached through association are removed to avoid them being transferred. What may appear to be a superstitious ritual is actually an acknowledgment of the meanings invested in material possessions and the significance of symbolic exchange.

McCracken (1988) suggests that those responsible for the radical reform of cultural meaning exist at the margin of societies. When radical groups declare their difference through consumer goods, they create symbolic messages that all can read. The act of protest then is also an act of participation and conformity.

In his seminal article on the relationship between possessions and the extended self, Belk (1988a, p. 139) has argued that, "we cannot hope to understand consumer behavior without first gaining some understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to possessions." Belk describes possessions as an extension of

self identity, the extended self comprising the body, individual ideas and experiences and those individuals and objects to which one feels attachment. While possessions regarded as inconsistent with individual identity were gladly disposed of, an unintentional loss of possessions was viewed as the diminishment of self; interference with another person's possessions was akin to an act of violation of that person. Possessions create, enhance, and preserve a person's sense of identity. For Belk, "we are what we have" is perhaps the most powerful maxim underpinning consumer behaviour.

Consumers may appropriate intangible objects by mastering them, such as climbing a mountain or by incorporating objects into self by creating them. This includes both material objects and abstract creations. As well as individual self-identity, group and family membership can also be defined and expressed through shared consumption. Individuals who shun social interaction often surround themselves with favoured objects, to which human characteristics are allocated. Likewise, clothing and bejewelling a spouse or children may be seen as little different from decorating a house or car. These actions represent an enhancement of self through material objects (Belk 1988a).

Acknowledging Sahlins' (1972) notion that hunter-gatherers were horrified at accepting gifts because such objects represented a burden within their nomadic life, Csikszentmihaly (1993) contrasted this view with the meaning attached to things by contemporary consumers. He argues that goods help objectify the self by demonstrating power and status, linking the self to past and present events as well as signposting future goals, or symbolically affirming social relationships. He argues further that this desire to confirm identity may have been more important in explaining economic development than the search for survival or comfort.

Csikszentmihaly (1993) proposes that, while the hunter-gatherer used weapons to demonstrate power and status, the contemporary consumer has replaced these with objects such as cars and sporting equipment. Likewise, in the quest for continuity of self, the home has become more than a utilitarian shelter. Rather it constitutes a collection of things that serve as repositories of meanings about the self. It provides symbolic links to others, past and present, signifies gender and status and reflects the permanency of relationships. The human body, he adds, was neither powerful enough, beautiful enough nor permanent enough to satisfy an individual's sense of self. As a result, objects are used as projections of self to magnify power, enhance beauty and sustain memories.

Consumers use goods as extensions of self (Csikszentmihaly 1993; Belk 1988a) and for the symbolic meanings they represent, usually constructed on the basis of perceived needs, or sacralised by attributing meanings independent of their original function (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989). Meaning is transferred, by advertising codes and imagery, to those who possess or use them and, in this way, the value of consumer goods is determined (McCracken 1988). Consumers also use goods reflecting different images to represent alternative identities, to provide freedom from boredom and to escape from social conformity (Firat 1992). In a study involving the preparation and consumption of food, Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) concluded that consumers use ritual consumption practices to actually construct culture and give further meaning to social life.

Symbolic meaning is not restricted to the realm of consumer culture however. It is also evident in many traditional cultural artefacts. Nor have these traditional artefacts escaped redefinition within a consumer culture. Traditional symbols of identity have been bought, borrowed, stolen and exchanged. Many conquering groups have subsumed symbols from vanquished former minorities, incorporating them into their own national identity. In many instances the symbolic meaning has

been changed from its original form. The totem poles of the American Indian and the boomerangs and art of the Australian Aborigines are illustrative examples. Local cultures may also have their symbols appropriated, with the authentic traditional meanings attached to ceremony and ritual being changed during their conversion to consumption goods by those from another culture (Graburn 1976).

### 2.2.1 THE COMMODIFICATION OF CULTURE

Sherry (1987) described marketing as the most potent force for both cultural stability and cultural change at work in contemporary society. In the period since the term 'market' first entered the English language during the twelfth century, until the late eighteenth century, its meaning changed from a place of exchange to a general process. Consumer culture, he argues, became an alternative to the traditional forms of culture that had imparted aesthetic and moral meaning to everyday life, while trade permeated cultural boundaries.

Consumer culture became a form of social control, a 'hegemonic way of seeing' superimposed upon existing cultural patterns (Fox and Lears 1983). It transformed traditional forms of culture into a commodity for consumption. In the process, the meanings expressed through, and attached to, traditional cultural artefacts were dislodged and re-contextualised via advertising and the mass market. This process is termed commodification.<sup>4</sup>

As the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption shifted from the orbit of goods to the satisfaction of experiences, status accrued to those who 'do' rather than those who 'have' (Sherry 1987). The consumption of art, science and nature through galleries, theatres, museums and national parks, can be expected to accelerate this conversion of experience to commodity.

During the process of globalisation, cultural hegemony and cultural homogenisation<sup>5</sup> became the handmaidens of consumer culture, subverting entire cultures by integrating Western consumer goods into traditional ways of life (Bodley 1982). However, this integration demonstrated the ability of traditional cultural systems to adapt and re-frame their meaning systems (Sherry 1987). Nor has the process been unidirectional. The increased demand for experiential consumption created by consumer culture, together with an associated increase in tourism, has resulted in the appropriation of cultural artefacts and symbols. Cultural artefacts and activities have often been stripped of their symbolic cultural meanings and commodified for tourist consumption.

In summary, Featherstone (1990) argued that, within contemporary consumer societies, goods classify the status of their bearer. Such societies use images, signs and symbolic goods to summon up dreams, desires, and fantasies. These provide romantic authenticity and emotional fulfilment in narcissistically pleasing oneself, rather than others. Contemporary consumer culture, he claims, is broadening the context in which such behaviour is deemed appropriate and socially acceptable. It is to this concept of consumer culture that attention is now directed.

## 2.3 THE CONCEPT OF CONSUMER CULTURE

Featherstone (1990) identified three perspectives for approaching the concept of consumer culture (the materialistic, the sociological and the hedonistic). The materialistic perspective was premised upon the purchase and use of consumer goods as a means of obtaining greater egalitarianism as well as a form of seduction and manipulation. The sociological perspective focused on the use of consumer goods to create social bonds or individual distinctions while the hedonistic perspective rested on the emotional pleasures, dreams and desires that are



manifested through cultural imagery and hedonistic pleasure seeking. Each of these perspectives is addressed in this section.

Consumer culture, consumer society and mass consumption have become synonymous clichés, each describing the pervasive influence of consumer goods within contemporary societies. To many, these terms conjure up images of opulent stores laden with glittering prizes and fashionable accoutrements; luxurious houses filled with every conceivable convenience; elegant clothing expressing refinement and taste; prestige cars representing individuality and social status; and televised images of cinema and sporting celebrities beamed to idolizing audiences. These images represent lifestyles of luxury, pleasure, and personal fulfilment, with an infinite array of worldly possessions that help to fulfil every desire and dream. Such concepts, however, neglect those marginalised on the outskirts of societies. For these people, consumption is often a matter of life and death, living as they do within environments scarred by poverty and its associated manifestations of homelessness, starvation and disease.

What then is the reality of contemporary consumer culture? Lury (1996) identified consumer culture as a special form of material culture, in which even mundane commodities are stylised and infused with romantic and exotic images. For Baudrillard (1988), it is the culture of a society in which people are surrounded by a profusion of material goods and images and, in which, principal relationships centre on objects and their meanings rather than other people. Baudrillard (1988) further argues that the modern consumer bases purchase decisions on cultural meanings and the lifestyle associated with them. The consumers within this material world develop an insatiable desire for goods; use goods to express their individuality and their belonging; understand themselves and others through what they have; and use consumer goods to establish and express personal and social identity (Belk 1988b; Fox and Lears 1983; Featherstone 1990; McCracken 1988).

To Owen (1992), the act of possessing has become a surrogate for doing and flaunting possessions is tantamount to using them. As discussed in the previous section, while it is the advertisers and marketers who create and diffuse product images, it is ultimately consumers who re-configure the meanings attached to these consumer goods. With the constant introduction of new products, a higher value is normally attached to novelty and fashion than to durability and utility. This results in what Campbell (1987) calls non-utilitarian hedonistic behaviours.

Belk (1995a) argued that consumer culture exists in terms of consumer desires, using two conceptual distinctions (needs and wants; and wishes and desires). Needs are desires for necessities while wants are desires for luxuries. This distinction is subjective and impacted by temporal and cultural variations. Belk also distinguishes between wishes and desires. Rather than a simple dichotomy, he suggests they are points on a continuum. While wishes are less serious hopes, desires have a more compelling urgency about them. Using these terms, Belk (1995a, p. 7) argues that a consumer culture arises when there is "a large and changing set of material objects together with a continual shift of these objects from wishes to desires and from luxuries (wants) to necessities (needs)." This is normally accompanied by a societal belief that material goods are a major source of well being and happiness. Rassuli and Hollander (1986) also describe a consumer culture as one in which the majority of consumers avidly desire goods and services, valuing them as status symbols, using them for envy provocation and seeking pleasure through their novelty.

It has been argued that, for a consumer culture to be sustainable, at least four basic preconditions are required. Firstly, a significant proportion of the population consume above a crude subsistence level thus enabling mass production, mass purchasing and the creation of new goods. Secondly, self-sufficient production is replaced by a market exchange system. Thirdly, consumption is socially accepted as

appropriate behaviour. Finally, non-utilitarian goods are accepted as differentiation and belonging markers (Belk 1988b; McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb 1982, Rassuli and Hollander 1986, Williams 1982). These preconditions are premised on an adequate production and distribution infrastructure (Dröge et al 1993).

Belk (1988b) also argued that, following the emergence of a consumer society, the use of consumer goods as markers of differentiation and belonging resulted in a societal change from envy avoidance to the use of material possessions for envy provocation. More recently, Ger (1997) suggested that the emergence of consumer society resulted in an increased desire for, and pursuit of, emotional satisfaction through material goods. It is evident that these four preconditions involve more than economic factors and that the symbolic values related to consumer goods are of equal importance.

Both Belk (1988b) and Miller (1996) suggested that these prerequisites are based on Western phenomena, adding a warning not to take the ethnocentric view that the consumption patterns that developed over at least two centuries in Europe, and which are now manifested in contemporary consumer society, need necessarily be repeated elsewhere. Consumer culture was never, nor does it remain, a uniquely European or American development. Ger (1995) claimed that, rather than replicating conditions that led to the emergence of these earlier consumer societies, emerging consumer societies involve an interaction of global forces, with a diverse set of localised historical, social and cultural factors.

Globally, many consumers in developing societies, such as Trinidad, Romania, Turkey, and India, have succumbed to the desires of a consumer culture, yet they are still without adequate food, clothing, shelter and sanitation (Belk 1988b; Belk and Ger 1994; Gell 1986; Miller 1987). Similar evidence is apparent within the remote Aboriginal communities of the Kimberleys in this study. In many

instances, the basic necessities essential for adequate nourishment and health standards are lacking, while novelty goods, television, leisure pursuits, gambling and alcohol abuse are evident. It is the emergence and practice of these consumption behaviours within the remote Kimberley communities that this study will attempt to explain. However, it is necessary first to understand the emergence of consumer culture as a global phenomenon.

### 2.3.1 THE EMERGENCE OF CONSUMER CULTURE

There is sufficient archaeological evidence to indicate that pre-historic humans created non-utilitarian objects with ascribed symbolic meanings (Halverson 1987) and that the wealthy of early civilisations as diverse as China, Egypt and Persia accumulated works of art and luxury goods (Belk 1995b). However, these early examples of symbolic and luxury consumption involved the elite only and cannot be viewed as representative of consumer societies. It is now generally considered that the emergence of consumer society was a European occurrence with McCracken (1988) and McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) locating events in England; Williams (1982) arguing for slightly later French roots; and Schama (1987) for earlier Dutch roots. Other writers proposed Asia origins (Adshead 1997; Clunas 1991).

Earlier writers advocated production oriented explanations for the increased level of consumption in eighteenth century England (McCloskey 1981; Mokyr 1977). They proposed that technological advances in production and the associated increase in consumer goods induced an upsurge in consumer demand (Deane 1965; Hudson 1983). Thirsk (1978) located the origins of consumer society in seventeenth century England, following the rise of imported goods, such as tobacco, and new commodities such as starch, pins, vinegar and knitted stockings. Lemire (1984) argued that eighteenth century England was the locus of

development caused by an increase in popular fashion based upon ready-made clothing and the development of the cotton industry.

It appears that an upsurge in consumer markets did precede steam power and the mass production factories of the eighteenth century (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb 1982; McCracken 1988). Dissatisfied with the maxim of supply creating its own demand, McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) argued for a demand-led 'consumer revolution' resulting in demand inspired production increases that became known as the 'industrial revolution.' They situated these events in eighteenth century England, suggesting that the motivating factor was an increase in overall wealth, which resulted in an increased propensity for society to consume in a self conscious emulative fashion. McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) warned, however, that the features of modern consumer society had not been fully achieved by 1800, nor should it be assumed that the birth of this consumer society had not been preceded by a lengthy gestation period.

Mukerji (1983) argued that there was no consumer revolution. Instead, she claims that there had been a gradual emergence of a consumer culture throughout Europe during the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries as global trade evolved into commercial capitalism. Consumer culture not only preceded the industrial revolution in production, but was also a factor in its creation. Citing the work of Mary Douglas and Marshall Sahlins, Mukerji emphasises the symbolic role of objects, suggesting that consumer goods, even mundane everyday objects, were a medium for expressing cultural meaning.

It would appear that, while English society remained predominantly rural and peasant until the eighteenth century (Braudel 1973; Thirsk 1978), there was gradual social change that provided the necessary preconditions for a consumer revolution (Braudel 1993). Technological innovations during the fifteenth century enabled

household output to exceed self-sufficiency, with subsequent increases in exchange activity. Separate areas emerged within homes for the specific purposes of negotiation, exchange of goods and entertainment. Further technological innovations and corresponding increases in production forced the relocation of production facilities from households to specialised shops and then to factories. At the same time, spatial separation took place between living areas and the kitchen, with specialised furnishings being introduced (Rybczynski 1986). Production became male dominated and was physically separated from consumption activities, which were delegated to women operating within the home (Forty 1986). These changes in social patterns and thinking were reflected in distinctions between production and consumption, work and leisure, plus private and public domains. Tuan (1982) also noted the emergence of private and specialised areas within homes and discussed the historical emergence of the concept of the self-evidenced in the proliferation of family portraits and mirrors.

Coincidental to these changes were even more profound changes in the way human beings thought about themselves and their behaviour, including their consumption behaviour. Thompson (1968) claimed that a 'picaresque, plebeian, working class culture' developed in England during the eighteenth century, well before the emergence of a capitalist mode of production. Campbell (1987) also makes this claim, adding that it developed into a class struggle, a response by an oppressed and exploited people demanding protection from economic and political subordination by the ruling class and the bourgeoisie.

McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) broadened the prevailing definition of the consumer beyond simply a 'buyer of goods', to a consumer of experiences. This view was expanded by McCracken (1988, p. 3) who claimed that this was:

*...not just a change in tastes, preferences, and buying habits, but a fundamental shift in the culture of the early modern and modern world. The consumer revolution is now seen to have changed Western concepts of time, space, society, the individual, the family, and the state.*

Rather than a radical change in social values, McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982, p. 53) argued that the consumer revolution was an outgrowth of existing bourgeois values. They attributed increased consumption levels not only to the purchase of humble products by the working classes, “the beer of London, the buckles and buttons of Birmingham, the knives and forks of Sheffield, the cups and saucers of Staffordshire, the cheap cottons of Lancashire,” but also to the spending on fashion clothing by the higher ranks of society, “who felt threatened for the first time by the loss of their distinctive badge of identity.”

While not dismissing the commercial changes prior to the eighteenth century, McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) suggested that conspicuous consumption and fashion during this period had been restricted to limited sections of society. The explosion of consumption that occurred in eighteenth century England included an expansion of markets, an increase in the choice of goods, obsolescence under the guise of fashion, an increased frequency of purchase, and an extension of credit, all of which represented the commercialisation of society.

### 2.3.2 FASHION AND EMULATION

Fashion was an important element in almost all fifteenth century European societies. The meaning attached to fashion clothing was so important that it served as the major indicator of social status (du Gay 1997). The importance of dressing appropriately to social position resulted in sumptuary laws that enforced appearance as a sign of status. These laws protected the privileged by forbidding lower social

classes from copying certain fashions, or indeed creating their own (Fine and Leopold 1993).

Sumptuary laws date back to pre-Christian Athens and were in evidence throughout Europe from at least the Middle Ages, reaching their zenith in sixteenth century England (Belk 1995a). Not only did they proscribe consumption pleasures, but also clothing that indicated the stigmatisation of marginalised social groups. In general, their purpose was to maintain class distinctions, prescribe moral behaviour, and limit expenditure on imported foreign luxury goods (Phillips and Staley 1961). As sumptuary laws were an attempt to maintain fashion as a sign of status during periods of social transition, their effect was also a vain attempt to counter the rise of a consumer culture. However, as society began to embrace novel goods and fashions during the eighteenth century, the laws collapsed under the forces of production and merchandising (Miller 1987; Belk 1995b). Rather than confining people to designated social positions, the sumptuary laws had the opposite effect by provoking the emulation of fashion (Craik 1994).

Servant girls were an important channel for the diffusion of fashion, copying the fashions worn by their mistresses. This represented no 'trickle down effect' but rather a flood of fashion change as upper classes attempted to maintain social distinctions through stylish apparel. Nor was wealth a limiting factor. Credit was extended and sacrifices made. Illustrating these sacrifices, Shamma (1990, p. 299) noted that, "the individual who drank tea in a teacup, wore a printed cotton gown, and put linen on the bed could be the same person who ingested too few calories to work all day and lived in a one room house." These same behavioural patterns are also evident in today's developing Second and Third World societies (Belk 1988b; Miller 1995; Belk and Ger 1994).



Markets for second hand clothing developed and a rapid increase in the theft of clothes during this century illustrates the infatuation of all social classes with fashion and their desire to be part of it (Tiersten 1993). Contemporary counterfeiting of branded goods had an established precedent some four centuries ago. Social changes went well beyond fashion and credit, however. They were pervasive and encompassed political, economic and social adjustments. McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982, p. 10) note that, "While the wealthy led the way by indulging in an 'orgy of spending', those who had watched on in disdain in earlier times now joined them." What had occurred, wrote McCracken (1988, p. 21), was the birth of consumer society. The participation of the English working classes in this consumption, he claimed, represented the first occurrence of mass consumption in 'the Western tradition.'

While supporting the central role of fashion in the demand led consumer revolution proposed by McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, McCracken (1988) questioned the origins of this new found fondness for fashion. While the social changes that provided the genesis of the consumer revolution can be situated in the Middle Ages and the manifestation of the consumer boom in eighteenth century England, McCracken contended that the origins of fashion and consumer culture were located in sixteenth century England. He attributes the origin of this change to the expenditure of national wealth as an instrument of political control by Queen Elizabeth I. By maintaining control over the resources of her domain, Elizabeth I forced the nobility to seek their share of wealth directly from herself, thus requiring their presence at her court. Nobility's fascination for extravagant displays of conspicuous consumption, especially through clothing and banquets, resulted in the nobility endeavouring to outdo all but Her Majesty in their quest for individual honour, increased social status and a closer relationship with the monarch.

Family consumption patterns in Elizabethan England were devoted to establishing and maintaining 'family status.' Families inherited goods that provided honour and status and, in turn, purchased goods to transfer this status to future generations. McCracken (1988) uses the concept of 'patina', an inherent status imbued within heirlooms and old family objects, to explain this process of meaning transferral. Whereas the patina associated with age was equated with prestige, newness was considered a sign of commonness. As nobility began to indulge in new fashions in their quest for Royal recognition, the concept of patina was gradually replaced by one of novelty.

Yet social change was even more widespread than this. The social demands on nobility to maintain proximity to the court in London distanced them from the rural areas. This reduced the trickle down influence of clothing fashion from aristocracy to subordinates. Also, the change in emphasis from inherited status to status seeking by the nobility; from family status to individual status through consumption; and from patina to fashion as a medium; resulted in a society McCracken (1988, p.16) describes as "primed for a round of consumer excess that would begin a century later." By the eighteenth century consumption occurred:

*more often, in more places, under new influences, by new groups, in pursuit of new goods, for new social and cultural purposes. The 'world of goods' was steadily making itself co-extensive with the world of social life (p.22), and ...the virus that had restricted itself to a minor aristocratic community had now affected everyone (McCracken 1988, p. 29).*

McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) argued that, during the eighteenth century, only England had the correct mix of ingredients needed for a consumer revolution (a fluid social structure, increasing wages and wealth, and an emulative bourgeoisie and its servants). Thus, by 1800 the world's first consumer society had

emerged in England, so that:

*There was a consumer boom in England in the eighteenth century. In the third quarter of that century that boom reached revolutionary proportions. Men, and in particular women, bought as never before. Even their children enjoyed access to a greater number of goods than ever before. In fact, the later eighteenth century saw such a convulsion of getting and spending, such an eruption of new prosperity, and such an explosion of new production and marketing techniques, that a greater proportion of the population than ever before was able to enjoy the pleasures of buying consumer goods. They bought not only necessities, but decencies, and even luxuries (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb 1982, p.9).*

However, the decline in the imposition of sumptuary laws did not mean an immediate acceptance of fashion by the masses, or the universal acceptance of a consumer culture. In order for consumer culture to become as entrenched as it appears to be today, further developments were required to infuse the individual and social desire for perpetual pleasure through the consumption of goods. These include the development of modern hedonism, the desire for novelty goods and the advent of mass merchandising. Each of these is addressed below.

### 2.3.3 THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN HEDONISM

Campbell (1987) argued that the middle class bourgeoisie were disproportionately responsible for the increase in demand for material goods, especially expressive goods, such as clothing, chinaware and artworks, that accounted for a significant portion of the upsurge in eighteenth century consumption. However, he rejected the notion that emulative consumption was central to this upsurge, since he could find no good reason to explain why the

middle classes should suddenly wish to emulate the aristocracy. Changes in attitudes toward consumption activities, including the willingness and desire to consume, he believed, were more important than the ability to buy. It was this change in attitudes that was the prerequisite to both the consumer and production revolutions. Campbell (1987) argues that, in all societies, patterns of consumption are embedded in custom, convention and habit and that changes in these patterns only occur when tradition is overcome. For this reason, the changes in consumption activities that accompanied the industrial revolution could not be taken for granted. So what were the cultural forces that enabled these traditions to be overcome?

While agreeing with McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) about the increase in wealth and purchasing power that had occurred during the eighteenth century, Campbell (1987) did not believe that this alone could explain the increased propensity of the middle class to consume. For Campbell (1987), it was the satisfaction of desires that held the key and, to explain this, it was necessary to distinguish between traditional consumption and the hedonistic consumption that he believed had emerged during the eighteenth century. Consumption behaviours associated with this modern hedonism involved:

*the search for ever more novel and varied consumptive experiences as an end-in-itself. It is the desire to desire, the wanting to want which is its hallmark...at any one time the individual is learning to be dissatisfied with what he has and desirous of what he has not. Above all, this continuous sequence of dissatisfaction and desire is propelled by an underlying sense of obligation and duty...and constitutes the ethical basis of consumerism (Campbell 1987; p.282).*

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the prevailing Protestant ethic, repressed emotions, encouraged frugality, and restrained material desires. While the acquisition of wealth for the benefit of the community was condoned, individual indulgence and the seeking of pleasure for its own sake were considered socially unacceptable. So how could such a dramatic change in social attitudes come about? Campbell (1987) believed that the emerging consumer ethic was grounded in the philosophy of Romanticism, which had replaced the Enlightenment during the eighteenth century.

Campbell (1987) described this romantic philosophy as a widespread pattern of attitudes and beliefs existing throughout Europe during the period 1750 to 1850. It was a reaction to the emphasis on reason and science, characteristic of the Enlightenment. As Calvinist beliefs were gradually replaced with more humanitarian attitudes, a new religious ethic developed. This evolved into a cult of Sentimentalism, in which religious emotion was socially redefined as pleasurable.

Romanticism emerged in secular life. The ethic of 'Sensibility'<sup>6</sup> was the foundation upon which pleasure derived from desire could develop. Romanticism emphasised feeling over cognition, imagination over intellect, and disorder over order (Campbell 1987). It espoused learning through experience and emphasised the value of feelings, particularly feelings of pleasure. A doctrine of individualism with associated notions of self improvement and new definitions of self were formed. It was from this Romanticism that the 'spirit' of modern consumerism evolved.

Campbell (1987) believed that it was the middle classes of the early period of industrialisation, especially young women, who were influenced most by this romantic ethic. He cites a combination of increased leisure time among young women, their exclusion from male domains, circulating libraries and a new art

form, the novel. These increased expectations resulted in dissatisfaction with educational and occupational opportunities for women, caused irresistible discontent, a desire to be seen and admired, and the notion of romantic love (Illouz 1997; Macfarlane 1987). This new ethos gradually spread to the working classes in general.

Campbell (1987) perceived the emerging consumer culture as based upon this consumer ethic and involving a belief in limitless desires, resultant discontent and consumption becoming an end in itself. This ethic involved nostalgia, daydreaming, and romance and was based on self-illusory hedonism. Consumers sought individual pleasures to fulfil their desires and infused goods with fantasy invoking images. The symbolic meaning of things became more valued than concrete utilitarian attributes.

As consumer culture evolved, claimed Campbell, it became impossible to divorce the pleasure and gratification involved with consumer goods from the imagery associated with them. Consumption was no longer perceived as simply a matter of choice but a matter of satisfying insatiable desires. As one desire was satisfied another would arise. Because expectations always exceeded reality, the gap between desire and fulfilment could never close. The consumer escaped reality through daydreaming, with consumer goods being integral to the realisation of these dreams. In this self-illusory world the fulfilment of any desire was possible as consumers experienced their perceived pleasures through daydreaming. Inevitably the consumer would be disappointed with reality and the cycle would be repeated. This continual search for pleasure, variety and novelty through consumption became self-perpetuating. Baudrillard (1988), also believes that modern Western consumption has become an alluring realm of seduction with few consumers able to escape its temptations. As Abercrombie (1994) stated:

*Their lives are organized around fantasies and daydreams about consuming; they are hedonists, primarily interested in pleasure, and sensual pleasure at that; they are individualists, largely pursuing their own ends and uncaring about others (p. 44).*

Modern hedonism, then, is characterised by a longing to experience, in reality, those pleasures created in the imagination, a longing which results in the ceaseless consumption of novelty. Deferred gratification is not regarded as a sacrifice of pleasure but a state of increased excitement, endured in anticipation of the heightened pleasures ahead. This emerging eighteenth century consumer ethic was further fuelled by the introduction of department stores and the advent of advertising, as images, the modern vehicles of the imagination, became more prevalent.

While the ability to daydream is not a recent human phenomenon, the pleasure-seeking ethic which evolved during the eighteenth century enabled its social acceptability (Campbell 1987). This is similar to McCracken's (1988) concept of 'displaced meaning', in which consumer goods are used as bridges between hopes and ideals, enabling what would otherwise fall beyond an individual's grasp. This perpetually renewed consumer expectations and, therefore, enlarged appetites.

McCracken(1988) suggested that the eighteenth century witnessed the installation of consumer society as a permanent feature of social life with consumption and society being inextricably linked in a continual process of change. Consumer society became self-sustaining, and was further refined with the emergence of the department store and advertising which enabled more sophisticated social meanings to be allocated to consumer goods. Even before the department stores evolved, however, the desire for novelty goods had been aroused.

### 2.3.4 THE ENCHANTMENT OF NOVELTY

Although consumer culture emerged initially in eighteenth century England, it was not solely an English, nor indeed a European, phenomenon. McCracken (1988) argued that there were numerous explosions of consumer culture that became more sustained and on-going by the eighteenth century. Considerable evidence exists to suggest that consumer cultures were evolving in other European societies, within the American colonies and within Asian countries (Adshead 1997; Breen 1988; Mukerji 1983). Likewise, there was an exchange of ideas and trade in consumer goods between these societies and these influenced consumption patterns. New products promoted the growth of markets, stimulated the desire for more novelty goods, and came to play a significant role in determining manufacturing patterns (Chaudhuri 1978; Lemire 1990).

It should be remembered that antiquity was an age of scarcity for most and consumer choice was a rarity. Even as late as the Middle Ages, European consumers had no access to contemporary 'necessities,' such as sugar, tea, coffee, chocolate or tobacco. Neither were silks, satins or woollen cloth readily available. Most Europeans were clad in rough flax clothing (Adshead 1997). The new goods were to arrive following the European economic expansion that heralded the beginning of economic and political globalisation. At the same time, China underwent a similar expansion within its own territories, which resulted in a similar spread of new commodities (Adshead 1997). As a result of these expansions, a host of new commodities found their way into new markets. American tobacco and potatoes arrived in Europe and China. Chinese silk products, tea, and porcelain arrived in Europe. Raw cotton was traded from India to China and reshipped as cotton cloth to Europe (Adshead 1997; Mintz 1985; Mukerji 1983). However, the supply of new goods was not automatically followed by an increase in demand and, to become a commodity, products must be consumed. While the initial consumption



of these foreign goods occurred among the aristocracy, they were diffused into the middle classes as urban cities developed during the sixteenth century. Again, this phenomenon was not restricted to Europe as consumers in Asia enjoyed the same novel pleasures. So what caused the widespread demand for novel foreign commodities, particularly in eighteenth century England? With the 'discoveries' of the New World, factual and fictional stories of encounters with the unknown led to a European fascination with goods considered to be unusual, exotic, rare or novel (Rennie 1995). As Belk (1995b) added, the fact that many of the foreign goods were promoted as forbidden pleasures or, like tobacco and sugar, were addictive stimulants added to their repeated consumption.

Neither was this desire for novelty a purely European phenomenon. The American colonies of the eighteenth century were also consumers of novel manufactured goods imported from England. Breen (1988) argued that American colonists were unwittingly united through their boycott of these imported British goods. A national consciousness, he claimed, was created through the American colonists' rejection of the 'baubles of Britain' with American political ideology being founded on the meaning of consumer goods. Witkowski (1989) argued further that this nonimportation policy resulted in a redefining of local goods to reflect new cultural meanings. As a consequence, the meaning of things derived from national identity rather than social status.

Breen (1988) believed that this consumer society had been created as the impoverished American cottage industry of the seventeenth century was swept away by a flood of consumer goods imported from Britain during the early eighteenth century. The ubiquitousness of these items transformed everyday life in provincial America as the goods acquired cultural significance within local communities and were used as mediums to define social status. Tracing through the colonial newspapers of the day, Breen (1988) concluded that, by mid eighteenth

century, Americans were confronted by a choice of consumer goods that would have amazed earlier generations. However, while previous historians had concentrated on the export of staples to Europe, he argued that they had depreciated the demand for imported consumer goods in the colonies. Not only were the colonists reliant on British merchants for what they perceived as the necessities of life, they also relied on continued British credit to sustain the consumption of these goods. It was only after colonial objections to British actions, resulting in the boycott of British consumer goods, that the meaning of these goods was symbolically re-defined, from goods of pleasure to vehicles of domination. Eighteenth century America, like Europe, embraced a Protestant ethic involving civic responsibility, a rigid morality and self-denial. As in Europe, this was replaced by a new set of social values that sanctioned leisure, compulsive spending and a permissive morality within a consumption oriented culture (Lears 1983).

Mass production, mass distribution and mass communication were required in combination to precipitate mass consumption. Belk (1995b) contended that the origins of consumer culture are temporarily and spatially diverse but noted that luxuries were gradually transformed into everyday goods through mass production. He argued that important market mechanisms were needed before commodities could be transformed into consumer fetishes. These included department stores and mass merchandising as well as advertising and a mass media.

### 2.3.5 DREAM WORLDS

The department store was a new form of marketplace that provided a source of delight and fantasy in which consumer goods were available for all to see and desire. With their grandeur, extravagant interiors, expanses of glass, sumptuous displays and exotic merchandise, they created an environment designed to pamper every consumer whim (Williams 1982). These stores also introduced an entirely

new set of social interactions inviting consumers to join together in a world of pleasure, comfort and amusement. Williams (1982) argued that department stores unleashed a wave of consumption in much the way that the courts of Elizabeth I had done for the nobility some three centuries earlier. They represented 'dream worlds' in which consumers became an audience entertained by commodities which were "organised to inflame material desires and feelings (Williams 1982, p. 67)." Department stores combined choice with desire and arousal, purchase with amusement and entertainment, consumption with dreams and fantasy.

Another development during the last three decades of the nineteenth century was the emergence of specialty shops catering to individual tastes. In London, the specialist stores that emerged along Oxford Street were described by the fifty year old wife of the Mayor of Mainz as:

*First one passes a watchmaker's, then a silk or fan store, now a silversmith's, a china or glass shop. The spirit booths are particularly tempting, for the English are in any case fond of strong drink. Here crystal flasks of every shape and form are exhibited: each one has a light behind it which makes all the different coloured spirits sparkle. Just as alluring are the confectioners and fruiterers, where, behind the handsome glass window pyramids of pineapples, figs, grapes oranges and all manner of fruits are on show (Adburgham 1979, p. 71).*

The modern consumer ethic, the genesis of which Campbell (1987) placed in the Romantic period, had come of age. The success of these 'dream worlds' is evidenced by the dramatic increase in shoplifting among middle class women (Lemire 1990).

Technological innovations not only enabled increased productivity and higher real incomes, they also created lower real prices and the materialisation of fantasies previously confined to the realm of imagination. Williams (1982, p. 84) claimed that the discovery of electricity enabled the implementation of lighting, which created a fairytale environment and "the sense of being not in a distant place, but in a make believe place where obedient genies leap to their master's command." Merchandise was raised above the ordinary everyday through association with exciting imagery. The 'silver screen' magically transposed people from their mundane existences to far off exotic places, replacing reality with fantasy and providing a fantasyland for adults. Department stores completed the demise of the sumptuary laws that had restricted the use of commodities to confer status. The store windows of late nineteenth century Chicago, for example, were described as realms of fantasy with:

*...no formal or informal sumptuary laws determining who could wear what kind of adornment. For the first time in history, all, regardless of rank, sex, race, religion, age, or birth, were urged to buy. (Duncan 1965, p. 114; cited in Belk 1995a).*

Stores and, in particular clothing stores, were having a social impact in Russia at this time. Wealthy women gathered in these stores and the surrounding streets to gossip and display their sartorial splendour and a fashion press kept them informed of the latest fashions, while advertisements were directed specifically at women in order to encourage further spending (Ruane 1995). While the working class could not afford to indulge they could at least come into the stores and admire the luxury goods and daydream about them.

Department stores also introduced credit and instalment plans, enabling the masses to participate in consumption fantasies. McCracken (1988) also suggests that department stores provided the escapist forums that people needed to cope with the social dislocations wrought by the Industrial Revolution. The stores infused consumer goods with the values, attitudes and aspirations of the French bourgeoisie of the day, while demonstrating to consumers "how they should dress, how they should furnish their home, and how they should spend their leisure time (McCracken 1988, p. 27)." They became schoolrooms where consumers could learn the skills needed for their new roles. The consumer revolution "could not have been better housed (McCracken 1988, p.29)."

The gendering of the domestic and production spheres was described as the organising logic behind nineteenth century middle class society. The ethic of female domesticity provided a crucial support for the culture of consumption to flourish (Tiersten 1993). The middle class patriarch vilified the new consumer culture and protected his family from its dangers by containing family members within his private domestic sphere. At the same time, this provided a retreat from the harshness of the public domain. The rise of department stores, with their policy of unrestricted entry, contravened prevailing class distinction practices. This resulted in questions being raised about respectability as ladies left their domestic sphere for the public domain of the department store. Even the etiquette books of the time could not agree as to whether public or private status should be conferred on department stores (Tiersten 1993). Material goods and their consumption were having profound changes on social patterns of behaviour. But what of the social role of women and their input to this consumer revolution?

As women embraced these new domains, ascribed meaning to fashion apparel and decorated their homes, it became apparent that they were not simply passive recipients of a male-created consumer culture, but rather vital participants in its

construction. In fact, women should be viewed as "both the agents and objects of consumer culture, as directors of household consumption and taste arbiters as much as ornaments of display (Tiersten 1993, p. 122)." Although the nature and extent of shopping may have varied across classes, it was women who performed the tasks of acquiring consumer goods for their families. Even today, conventional marketing wisdom concedes that supermarkets and department stores are "predominantly female worlds (Reekie 1993, p. xi)."

The final marketing factor that influenced the development of consumer culture was the emergence of advertising and a mass media. While print advertising was evident in Europe and America from at least the middle of the nineteenth century, it remained relatively unsophisticated (Thompson 1990). When product branding became more prevalent at the end of this century, however, manufacturers took advantage of the mass media to promote their merchandise without fear of benefiting competitors. This resulted in a ten-fold increase in the volume of American print advertising, often instructing the public about what and how they might consume (Belk 1995b). Advertising changed from an emphasis on the functionality of goods and increasingly provided images of the 'good life,' emphasising luxury, pleasure and desirability (Belk and Pollay 1985).

By the turn of the twentieth century, the American advertising industry was endeavouring to arouse and excite consumers, persuading them that, without certain consumer goods, they were destined to 'miss out on life' (Lears 1983). By the nineteen twenties, advertisements for motor vehicles promised style, status and an escape from everyday, ordinary experiences to the exotic real life. These twentieth century American advertisements produced a fantasy world of wish fulfilment and, in terms reminiscent of the self-illusory modern hedonism described by Campbell (1987), a new consumer culture in which:

*Roller coasters, exotic dancers, and hootchy kootchy girls all promised temporary escapes to a realm of intense experience, far from the stuffy unreality of bourgeois culture (Lears and Fox 1983; p. 10).*

While mass media commenced with the print publications of the nineteenth century, the most significant influences followed the introduction of television broadcasts with their profound impact upon social relationships (Thompson 1990). However, the audience does not comprise an inert and un-differentiated mass but specific groups in particular social contexts. Messages are interpreted in different ways depending on the contexts in which they are received. Neither, he argued, should this one way process be referred to as communication, because the receiver does not contribute to the process. Diffusion is a more accurate description, while television may be better described as the institutionalised production and public diffusion of symbolic meanings and images to vast, socially and temporally remote audiences.

These mass mediated symbolic forms are central to contemporary culture. Technology has enabled the exchange of these symbolic forms to be widely circulated rather than being restricted to face-to-face interactions (Thompson 1990). The production and circulation of symbolic forms has become increasingly and irreversibly caught up with the processes of commodification and transmission that are global in character. Technological innovations, during the latter part of the twentieth century, have led to rapid increases in the speed and spread of cultural change. Thus:

*With the rapid development of these institutions and the exploitation of new technical devices, the production and circulation of symbolic forms was increasingly mediated by the institutions and mechanisms of mass communication. This process of the mediazation of culture was pervasive*

*and irreversible. It is a process that accompanied the rise of modern societies, that partially constituted these societies and that defined them, in part, as modern. And it is a process that continues to take place around us and to transform the world in which we live (Thompson 1990, p. 162).*

Thompson (1990) describes television as the engine of modern consumer culture, its lens the primary means of individual self-definition and the medium through which individuals both view, and are viewed by, society. He also criticises television's negative impact on society, arguing that children witness the same images as adults and, therefore, no longer need to seek social guidance from them. As such, television has usurped the roles of family and school in the education of children and provided them with access to the private as well as the public domain. Today's consumer has become a creature of comfort stimulated by television's fantasy creations, seeking instant gratification yet failing to gain genuine experiences. (Thompson 1990). While television engenders individuality and egalitarianism, these conflict with individual desires for acceptability through social conformity. Television has redefined credibility and power by creating celebrities, who communicate with individuals by stepping out of their make believe world with its fabricated lifestyles to promote products. Owen (1992) supports this argument, adding that television promotes commodification as a virtue, prescribes acceptable social behaviour and legitimises choice within an individual's world of fantasy. Image has become everything, with empty slogans full of symbolic meaning.

### 2.3.6 THE CRITICS OF CONSUMER CULTURE

Lears and Fox (1983) characterised consumer culture as an ethic, a standard of living and a power structure encouraging individuals to equate commodities with personal welfare and, ultimately, to conceive of themselves as commodities. They



criticised consumer culture as little more than narcissistic indulgence, with human values being distorted and commodities becoming more important than people. Consumer goods became not simply ends in themselves but also a means of acquiring desired ends, such as love and friendship.

From the beginning of mass consumption in Britain, the values of hard work and austerity, espoused by the Protestant ethic, were questioned by the mass of consumers. In their place new social values developed, that Campbell (1987) termed a modern consumer ethic. Almost immediately, critics questioned whether these new values were inferior to previously prevailing collective values and whether this new consumer ethic provided the same meaning to life or resulted in social neglect. The critics warned of the inherent dangers of this powerful and all pervading force, based, as they believed, on greed and self indulgence.

Dröge et al (1993) criticised the culture of consumption as pervasive, widely admired, an insatiable desire for material possessions and a societal disease. The most severe criticism, however, was directed toward the mass media and the role of television in particular. Owen (1992) argued that modern consumer society was a 'closet culture' of individuals who experienced life through a vast array of technological gadgets. Television reinforced its own supremacy while undermining the veracity of interpersonal relations. In addition, it fostered a sense of commonality among the mass public by translating abstract societal norms, frequently originating from elites, into sounds and pictures.

Schudson (1991) classified the critics of consumer culture as: (1) Puritans, whose focus is primarily upon the sacrilegious meaning falsely ascribed to consumer goods (2) Quakers, who focus on the wasteful characteristics of consumer culture (3) Marxists, who emphasise the inherent exploitation of the economic system required to sustain consumer culture (4) Republicans, who

espouse the selfishness of individualism at the expense of public welfare and (5) Aristocrats, who primarily complained about consumer culture's replacement of aesthetic beauty with mass produced 'ugliness.'

Critics within each of these categories argued that consumption, in itself, cannot ensure a meaningful life and, in fact, has a deleterious influence. They differ, however, in their explanation of the inherent hindrances and social neglect arising from the acquisition, possession and disposal of material goods. Each of these arguments is discussed briefly.

### **Puritans**

These critics focused on social attitudes toward material goods themselves, on the ungodly idolisation of goods, the sacrilegious meaning ascribed to them, the false promises of social salvation and the ultimate and socially inappropriate addiction to consumption. Puritan views are based on Protestant ethic beliefs that individual pleasure should be subordinate to spiritual pursuits. They argued that people should invest less meaning in material goods and more to spiritual activities, that the two are mutually exclusive and that a material desire and love of consumption are evil.

Schudson (1991) cites Raymond Williams and Christopher Lasch as contemporary examples of Puritan criticism. Williams (1974) criticised advertising as being irrelevant and adding unnecessary meaning to consumer goods, while Lasch (1979) described contemporary consumption as addictive and compulsive, social attitudes toward goods as Satanised rather than spiritualised and consumers as being possessed by their possessions. Schudson (1991) suggested that these critics have caused many consumers to ignore or distrust advertising.

While early twentieth century attitudes equated home produced goods as poor in relation to manufactured goods, Puritan critics suggested these attitudes should be reversed. Schudson (1991), however, asked whether the meanings attached to mass produced goods differ at all from those attached to home made products.

### **The Quakers**

Quaker critics concentrated on the features of consumer goods, rather than attitudes toward their use. Rather than addiction and false adulation, they address unnecessary wastefulness and extravagance. Consumer goods, they believe, should be favoured for utility, durability and re-useability, rather than fashionability or planned obsolescence. They criticise marketers for attributing unfounded symbolic meaning to consumer goods in the pursuit of product differentiation and market manipulation.

Schudson (1991) argued that Quaker critics had generalised too easily from a few examples and that many consumer goods do not fit such descriptions. It is a marketing strategy for certain conditions, he suggests, and not an underlying cultural force. He poses the question of whether planned obsolescence was a response to consumers' desire to be fashionable or a cause of fashion consciousness. He also asks how society should arrive at a consensus for acceptability. Who should determine what products are wasteful and what should be the basis for moral objections to excessive consumption?

As the emerging bourgeoisie began to take control of the means of production, historical conditions were set in place for the Marxian, or socialist, critique to emerge in the late nineteenth century.

## **The Socialists**

The Socialist critique was based on the alleged exploitation of workers within the capitalist system of production that had serviced the development of a consumer culture. Unique to this critique is the inevitability of the system's own self-destruction. Contemporary critics argued that the ruling class would continue to accumulate wealth and maintain political and social control through the mass media. For them, society, is distracted from the drudgery of work through the medium of mass consumer goods and the replacement of reality with illusion. This results in the creation of an ideology of 'false consciousness,' explaining both worker acquiescence within developed countries and the exploitation of the undeveloped world by multinational organisations.

Schudson (1991) disputed this critique. While conceding that consumer goods may provide distractions, he does not believe they are illusory; rather they are real objects with authentic meanings. Nor does contemporary society comprise a homogeneous group of non-thinking consumers, but individuals within social networks that provide links to society as a whole. The symbolic meanings of consumer objects and media images are, therefore, interpreted differently by different people, in both the developed and undeveloped world (Gottdiener 1985).

## **The Republicans**

With the dramatic increase in the production of consumer goods in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, the middle and upper classes came to occupy important positions in a more mobile society. Extravagant displays of status seeking consumption resulted. While this desire for conspicuous consumption was not a new phenomenon, the ability of the masses to engage in it was. Critics soon expressed concerns about these 'inappropriate leisure activities.' While

unconcerned with material goods or extravagant wastefulness, Republican critics expressed concern about the corrupting influence of consumer goods on society. Objections were based on the priority accorded to possessing goods, inappropriate choice criteria and the emphasis placed on lifestyle, status and personal identity through possessions. This, they argued, was at the expense of the contribution to social well being through work productivity. Advertising, and the displays of goods that appealed to individual fantasies, were criticised for leading to individual selfishness and the encouragement of a mentality of complacency.

Again, Schudson (1991) questioned the validity of these criticisms. While there are degrees of consumption, just as there are degrees of disengagement in labour activities, he asks, why should labour be the defining feature of human existence? Why should consumption be treated as peripheral to human fulfilment? Does the social symbolism of advertisements create a consumer culture or support it? Schudson (1991) argues that America was materialist, consumerist, and enterprising long before advertising achieved much visibility in cultural life. Yet, he added, advertising is the chief symbol, if not the chief engine, of a consumer culture.

As already noted, the late twentieth century witnessed a further shift in social values. Consumer goods were increasingly used to fulfil personal fantasies and dreams rather than social status needs. Television was criticised for usurping the role of family and school and of providing fantasy illusions without social rewards or punishments. Schudson (1991, p. 29) questioned whether material goods indeed require force-feeding. With the diffusion of consumer culture, he wrote, "no multibillion dollar industry was needed to make people want more and more or to breed in them a dissatisfaction that they could quell only in the marketplace." Consumer culture was sustained by goods rather than manufactured images.

## **The Aristocrats**

The aristocratic objection to the consumer culture is one of aesthetics, an attack on the 'ugliness' of mass produced consumer goods. It is premised upon pricing considerations, resulting in the destruction of uniqueness and beauty. Again, Schudson (1991) used relativist arguments, pointing out that the valuing and defining of exclusive objects as beautiful, while maintaining limited access to them, was elitist and undemocratic. Mass produced goods may lack the beauty of hand made objects but their affordability has undoubtedly enabled aesthetic consumption to become more accessible to many more people. He questions whether aesthetics should be exclusive to elitist minorities.

Modern day societies depend on consumer goods to express cultural principles and ideals, to create and sustain lifestyles and notions of self, and to act as elements of social change. The 'reciprocal truth' for the detractors of consumer culture, suggested McCracken (1988), was that modern cultures are also dependent on consumption to maintain their very existence.

Having examined the concept of consumer culture and discussed its origins and development within Europe, it is now necessary to examine the means by which a consumer culture was diffused to other societies, particularly within what has been termed the 'developing' world. Here, political and economic conditions differed widely, as did the historical, social and cultural contexts in which the diffusion of consumer culture occurred. In addition to the internal forces evident in the early modern period of European development, powerful external factors influenced the process elsewhere. Development of the productive capacity required to fuel a consumer revolution, and the consumer ethic required to sustain it, have not been mere repeats of the European experience. The following section discusses the theories that attempted to explain economic development, followed by a

contemporary discussion of the phenomenon of globalisation.

## 2.4 DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Following the transition to modernity, which culminated in Europe during the early twentieth century, academic discourse focused upon the meaningfulness of social interaction, the breakup of old styles of life and future expectations for the modern world. The period from the commencement of the First World War in 1914 to the cessation of the Second in 1945, represented an ideological break in the debate about societal change. Following the conclusion of hostilities in 1945 and the subsequent political realignment in Europe, the revival of academic concern about societal change shifted to the communist bloc, or Second World, followed soon after by the developing Asian and African regions, or the Third World (Robertson 1992). Academic concern about the development of indigenous societies within the Fourth World remained within the realm of anthropology.

Several theories have been proposed to explain economic development, all focusing on production capabilities, rather than consumption. These are discussed under two headings: modernisation theories and political economy theories. Both adopt dualistic frameworks and assert that being developed is a universally desirable goal.

### 2.4.1 MODERNISATION THEORIES

Modernisation theories combine neoclassical economics and social change theory and are premised on the evolution of societies from undifferentiated traditional subsistence systems to complex, modern industrialised economies (Nettle and Robertson 1968). They attempt to explain and diagnose economic under-development, then provide complex internal structures to enable

industrialisation. Technology transfer and the diffusion of appropriate skills and attitudes through educational programs are implicit components (Tomlinson 1991). These theories are synonymous with economic and social change and consider development to be inevitable and desirable. Modernisation theories may be further categorised into five groupings.

### **Stages of Development**

Now regarded as ethnocentric, the exemplar for this approach is the work of Rostow (1960). Having isolated technology as the key to development, Rostow examines the patterns of social change that lead to modernisation. He proposes five stages of growth, involving economic factors and the development of entrepreneurial values and attitudes, by which societies can advance. In stage one, improvements to agricultural methods enable the traditional subsistence society to develop transport and power. These establish the stage two 'preconditions for take off.' Stage three, 'the take off into self sustained growth', involves the development of a manufacturing industry, while the wealth and infrastructure which this provides permit the 'drive to maturity' of stage four. Finally, stage five ( mass high consumption) is represented by a shift from the production of basic commodities to high technology luxury goods. Rostow emphasises the need to replace domestic production with agricultural commercialisation, industrialisation and urbanisation.

Critics of 'the stages of development approach' argued that it proposed developing societies embark on programs modelled on western experiences, with scant regard for their specific cultural, historical or economic contexts. Little concern is granted for the possibility of conflict or internal resistance to change.



### **Pre-requisites for Development**

This approach focuses on the prerequisite infrastructure for economic development, including technological innovations, the availability of capital, credit facilities and an adequate market structure (Tomlinson 1991). Proponents stressed the importance of improved distribution networks, efficient delivery systems, effective marketing information systems, retailing systems and marketing innovations that enabled the promotion of consumer goods (Joy and Ross 1989). The underlying assumption was that value changes are inevitable and indispensable. Critics contend that it conceals the reasons why these problems exist in developing societies (Joy and Ross, 1989).

### **The Dual Economy**

This variant of modernisation theory envisages two co-existing societal sectors within developing countries; a traditional sector and a modern sector. While the traditional sector presented obstacles to economic development and thus maintained poverty, the modern sector provides the impetus for successful change (Joy and Ross 1989). Critics argue that this approach fails to explain how the dual sectors originated and that historical factors were more significant in explaining developments than the proposed universal evolutionary factors (Hermassi 1978).

### **Socio-cultural Obstacles to Growth**

This variation focused on the influences of social change on economic development within developing societies. McClelland (1967) argued that individuals in modern societies are rational beings, exhibiting a strong need for achievement, while peasant groups in developing countries resist change and inhibit modernisation by their adherence to conservative values and attitudes. Singer (1972), however,

suggested that existing social structures and attitudes within developing societies facilitate development because peasants, like individuals in modern society, act out of self-interest. Others have been critical of this ethnocentric, socio-cultural approach, stating that this variant of modernisation theory reflects unbridled positivism and fails to seek reasons for the assumed unresponsiveness of the people (Joy and Ross 1989).

### **The Improvement Approach**

These theories propose improved production, marketing and distribution systems as a means of economic development. While advocating the continuity of prevailing social institutions and land tenure patterns, they encourage new crop varieties and community improvements in health, sanitation and literacy levels. Cultural change follows social, economic, political and material changes.

Modernisation theories have been criticised for their theoretical simplicities and historical blind spots (Tomlinson 1991). They are based upon the notion that, by increasing overall national wealth through structural change, there will be a trickle down to the less fortunate and, consequently, create increases in living standards (Anderson 1964). However, they largely ignore the implications of reduced self-sufficiency and the breakdown of entrenched social structures. Neither do modernist theories take account of the historical evidence of contact between societies. By seeking to explain customs and institutions in terms of the functions they perform, they generalise across time and cultures. They involve 'typical individuals' abstracted out of context and make the assumption that 'being developed' is a universally desirable goal (Joy and Ross 1989). Dholakia and Sherry (1987) criticised the ethnocentric assumptions of modernist theories, especially the belief that there will be no adverse acculturating influence and that marketing is of benefit to consumers in developing countries.

## 2.4.2 POLITICAL ECONOMY THEORIES

Political economy theories are qualitatively different from modernisation theories, particularly with reference to the role of the state, and the conceptualisation of linkages of parts to wholes. They challenged modernist theory notions about a benevolent transfer of the attitudes and technology required for industrialisation. The political economy theorists suggested that development and under-development are the simultaneous results of a single global capitalist system, with development of one society dependent on the under-development of others. Citing the failure of modernisation theory to take account of the historical evidence of contact between societies, they offered a fuller explanation through dependency theory and world systems theory, especially by addressing socio-political considerations in addition to economic growth.

### **Dependency theory**

The underlying premise of dependency theory is that the industrialisation of the developed world was achieved through its exploitation of Third World countries. This resulted from colonisation and the appropriation of wealth from 'periphery' countries to the dominant colonial or 'core' power (Frank 1967). This hierarchical power structure is not confined to a national level but is evidenced within nations as one sector develops at the expense of others. Industrialised countries maintain the dependency of 'periphery' countries through the power of multinational companies and the manipulative power of the media (Tomlinson 1992). In the end the periphery regions are trapped into relationships in which they are powerless to control economic and political decisions or even their cultural destiny (Dholakia and Firat 1988).

## **World Systems Theory**

World systems theory is an extension of dependency theory. Wallerstein (1979) asserted that the world economic system originated in sixteenth century Europe as capitalism crossed political boundaries and diversified. An inequitable division of labour emerged, as European industrialised powers became 'core' states, exporting mass produced consumer goods to 'periphery' states, whose weak central governments lacked political control. Consumer goods manufactured in the core region were exchanged for raw materials produced cheaply by an underpaid labour force in the periphery states.

Wallerstein (1979) argues that this world system prevailed. Central to its structure was a systematic interaction between sectors. The elite of the developed world formed relationships with structurally inferior developing society elites who, in turn, controlled those beneath them. This pattern constituted international, national and regional hierarchical linkages that, in turn, constituted a world system. Critics argued that international trade exchanges and the division of labour, now dependent on sophisticated transportation and military technology, maintain inequitable trade links favouring the core states, while continuing to impoverish the dependent peripheries. Undervalued, developing world resources translate as profits for the multinationals, with under rewarded labour in the periphery states.

Costa (1988) provides a fascinating account of social change in Cephalonia using world systems theory. Here, social change occurred over three centuries, with the balance of power between core and periphery shifting nationally and internally. While the aristocratic and merchant classes enabled the first changes, it was the return of citizens who had left during an earlier period of recession that completed the mass change. These migrant citizens had worked in the developed countries but had retired to their developing homeland with their possessions. They

diffused a consumer ethic among the Cephelonians, while the arrival of tourism and its consequent expenditure provided the funds needed for a mass consumer culture to be adopted.

Despite the inherent appeal of the more macro-oriented political economy approach, it is also problematical. Nash (1981) criticised the lumping of all periphery countries together. Did this mean, he asked, that the situation in Hong Kong was the same as that in Brazil? Hermassi (1978) took issue with the neglect of internal dynamics within developing societies and the vagueness of policies regarding technology transfer and development. Joy and Wallendorf (1996) questioned the ability of political economy theories to explain the emergence of a consumer culture in developing countries. Others cited the resentment and anger caused during core-periphery exchange (Joy and Ross 1989). In addition to appropriating cheap labour and materials, core countries retrieved their expenditure through consumer goods. While Big Macs, videos and cigarettes may result in cheaper clothing and electronic goods for the core country's consumers, the bargain must be questionable to consumers in the periphery country (Ger and Belk 1994).

The emergence of consumer cultures in the developing world has been described as causing distortions to prevailing cultural values (Thompson 1990). Criticism of such behaviour, however, should not be distorted by ethnocentric value judgements. Does anybody have the right, for example, to judge the rationality of a consumer in an economically developing society who chooses to reduce the food consumption needed for subsistence in exchange for the immediate gratification obtained from consuming a foreign cigarette to gain the social rewards this may provide? If such a practice is acceptable in the developed world, why should it be any different within another context?

Political economy theorists regard the dichotomy of economic development and underdevelopment as related and causal. Dependency theorists argue that this is brought about through the exploitation of peripheral underdeveloped regions by technologically and politically superior core powers. The situation is maintained through dependency. World systems theorists extend the concept, proposing international, national and regional hierarchical linkages that constitute a world wide system. While these theories may in part explain economic development in developing societies, they cannot explain development in remote Aboriginal communities of the Kimberley. Neither can they explain the desire for consumer goods, the difference in the meanings attached to these goods, or the manner in which these goods are consumed. Some of these may be explained by the phenomenon of globalisation, however, and it is to this concept that attention is now directed.

## 2.5 CULTURAL GLOBALISATION

Globalisation has had an increasingly crucial impact on contemporary lifestyle throughout the world and, consequently, has been the subject of considerable and controversial academic discourse (Featherstone 1990; Miller 1995; Robertson 1995; Thompson 1995; Tomlinson 1991). In general, globalisation is a complex process involving transnational economic, political and cultural forces in the dissolution of traditional national and community boundaries. In the process, local patterns of everyday lifestyle are influenced. However, globalisation does not displace everything that preceded it. National and local cultural patterns exist alongside the new global elements. There have been a number of explanations for the emergence of this phenomenon.

Appadurai (1990) described globalisation as a phenomenon that cannot be understood in terms of core and periphery models, balance of trade models or development theories involving producers and consumers. He proposed five dimensions of global cultural flows, which form the basis of historically constituted multiple worlds, ranging from nation states to face-to-face groups. These are: (1) technoscapes that enable the movement of technology across boundaries by multinationals and governments; (2) financescapes that disperse global capital through currency markets, stock exchanges and commodity speculation; (3) ethnoscaples that enable tourists, immigrants, refugees, and guest workers to deal with the reality of having to move or the fantasy of wanting to move; (4) ideoscapes that enable the spread of political images related to state ideologies, such as freedom, sovereignty and democracy; and (5) mediascapes that enable the dissemination of imagery through the print and electronic media. Globalism, he claims, was driven by disjunctures between these rapid and continuously changing flows. Not only is Globalism itself changing constantly, it is also a major force of change. Appadurai (1990) argues that the central problem of globalisation was the tension between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogeneity. While the homogenisation argument is most commonly about 'Americanisation' or 'commoditisation,' it fails to consider that societies tend to 'indiginise' goods in one way or another.

The earliest explanations of globalisation were centred on the concept of cultural imperialism. Historically this traces back to the domination of economically powerful European states during their period of commercial expansion from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. These European powers were supplanted during the twentieth century, firstly by the rise of America as an economic and political superpower, and, secondly, with the advent of global commercial enterprises. In their quest for profitability in a dynamically competitive global

market, global corporations adopted media technology to enlarge their media spaces and potential markets by dissolving the frontiers of national communities. National governments were virtually powerless to regulate their activities (Ohmae 1993). Subsequently, economic hegemony was followed by cultural hegemony. While economic domination impacted on the material well being of global consumers, cultural hegemony impacted on their daily lives and their cultural identity. These global shifts created social change and cultural dislocation. As du Gay (1994) noted:

*The new electronic media not only allow the stretching of social relations across time and space, they also deepen this global interconnectedness by annihilating the distance between people and places, throwing them into intense and immediate contact with one another in a perpetual 'present' where what is happening anywhere can be happening wherever we are (Cited in Hall 1997, p. 210).*

Eventually, the symbolic spaces of national cultures were replaced by the symbols of a global consumer culture. Shapiro (1994) further illustrated these policies through the actions of the Benetton company. He argued that it had:

*...made explicit its desires to dominate the mediascape with a symbolism that comprehends nationalities, ethnicities, religions, and even tribal affiliations. The world of geopolitical boundaries - boundaries transversed by Benetton's enterprises- is no impediment to the production of media-carried global symbolism (Shapiro 1994, p. 442).*

There have been many critics of this so called cultural imperialism. Schiller (1979) argued that it created brand loyal global consumers, whose social reality was mediated through commodities, while traditional cultures were replaced by an homogenised 'cultural slop.' Friedman (1994) described cultural hegemony as the



imposition of an homogenised consumer culture, accompanied by the diffusion of American values, consumer goods and lifestyles. This commodified western culture, he believed, would ultimately replace cultural diversity. Baker (1989) described cultural imperialism as the imposition of a supposedly superior American way of life, which claimed to be in everyone's best interest, while Woollacott (1995) wrote of peripheral cultures being absorbed into an homogenous global core which he termed a global Disneyland. Hannerz (1991) argued that the perception of globalisation as a tide of American 'shlock' replacing authentic cultures with an homogenous plastic culture of Coca Cola and McDonalds is not in fact what is happening in periphery societies. Instead, local cultures have constructed hybrid cultures by appropriating elements of this global culture and infusing these into their own local, self-reproducing, 'creolised' cultures.

Although theories of cultural imperialism have fallen out of favour, they have not been completely rejected. Some nation states still oppose what they perceive as cultural homogenisation and the erosion of their cultural specificity by implementing restrictive policies. Satellite dishes, for example, have been banned in Saudi Arabia and Egypt and, despite an estimated half a million dishes in Teheran, by the government of Iran (Thompson 1997). There is also a growing trend toward the reclaiming of ethnic identities and homelands, as well as fundamental religious beliefs. The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the assertion of Basque identity in Spain and the fight against Russian domination by the Chechnyans provide vivid reminders of how local loyalties can resist enforced integration.

Considerable superficial evidence of the global spread of western cultural values and practices exists, as for example in the ubiquity of Hollywood, CNN, Disney, McDonald's, and Coca Cola products. Ohmae (1991, p. 72) argued that the symbolic power of these goods should not be over-estimated, adding that the desire-inducing images from the West were the major causal factor in German re-

unification because:

*Antennas on what were recently East German roofs brought images of the West German good life into the homes of millions of people. The impulse to tear down the Wall did not originate from any sense of nationalism but from a desire for blue jeans and more consumer choices.*

While this domination of western material products represents a wilful exploitation of weaker cultures by the more economically powerful, in reality it is a 'soft imperialism' relative to the coercive cultural impositions of nineteenth century colonial expansion. However, it is also apparent that global enterprises must understand and make allowances for national and even local conditions and constraints to remain successful in the global marketplace (Thompson 1997).

There is also the matter of variation in cultural preference and cultural interpretation to be considered. Diffusing consumer culture through global telecommunications networks does not necessarily ensure that these images will remain intact and unchanged in meaning as:

*The meanings of even the most universal of imagery for a particular population derives as much from the historical experiences and social status of that group as from the encoded intentions (Ger and Belk 1994, p.4).*

Large domestic audiences mean that American media producers recoup production costs internally, enabling them to export their products at an extremely competitive price. While this may explain the dominance of American media products on international markets, Dziadel (1993) pointed out that this simply represents cost effective scheduling by programmers. Domestic media productions continue to dominate prime time viewing.

There is also evidence that language and cultural differences limit the appeal of foreign programs among domestic audiences (Hoskins and Mirus 1988). Even more significant is the matter of cross cultural interpretation of media text. Studies suggest that the interpretation of meanings associated with cultural images, values and lifestyles often differ from those constructed by the original producers (Ang, 1985; Liebes and Katz, 1993). While economic and political dominance may be enforced by the physical movement of goods, cultural hegemony is modified by the complex meanings embedded in consumer goods and in the interpretations that accompany their appropriation. Liebes and Katz (1993, p. xi) pointed out that arguments of cultural imperialism cannot be supported on the false belief that they are "prepackaged in Los Angeles, shipped out to the global village, and unwrapped in innocent minds."

There has also been a re-examination of the core-periphery dualism model of concentrated total power residing in the western core with a corresponding economic and cultural subordination of periphery societies. Giddens (1990) argued that this model has a more decentralised diffusion of power, with the 'Asian tigers' being an example of this relocation of power away from the First World countries. Contemporary globalisation, suggested Giddens (1990), still displays a pattern of advantage and disadvantage but one that may now causally link, for example, the prosperity of Singapore to the impoverished slums of Pittsburgh. Massey (1994) supported this view, adding that there can be little argument that large sections of society are still marginalised and excluded from the benefits of globalisation.

Hannerz (1991) believed that the long term implications of globalisation were the obliteration of diverse and unique cultures by an homogenised global culture. Giddens (1990), however, believed that this would not be a uni-directional imperialism, as non-Western cultural traditions would inevitably be incorporated. Cultural domination of the original western core powers, he argues, will be

diminished as an hybridised global culture evolves. Giddens cites as examples the increasing adoption of non-western religions by westerners and the study of Asian management practices by western managers.

Adding even further to this trend is the increased mobility of tourists, who not only transfer cultural traditions by example but also observe others. Belk (1988b) suggests that international tourism may lead to a sameness with consumers in almost every corner of the globe eating the same foods, listening to the same music, wearing the same fashions, watching the same television programs and films and driving the same cars. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the concept of de-territorialisation. This involves the diffusion of cultural practices through the relocation of migrants and refugees from developing societies into western society, a type of reverse invasion in which the periphery infiltrates the core (Appadurai 1990; Robins 1997), so that:

*Very large numbers of the poorer people of the globe have taken the 'message' of global consumerism at face value, and moved toward the places where 'the goodies' come from and where the chances of survival are higher. In the era of global communications, the West is only a one-way airline ticket away (Hall, 1992, p. 306).*

Despite the symbolic shrinking of spatial distances which communication technology has enabled, the undeniable popularity and diffusion of western consumer goods and its associated problems for cultural identity, the claims that cultural imperialism will result in a homogenised global culture dominated by western society do not appear tenable. The most important factors denying this are the mobility of cultural practices, the reverse osmosis from periphery to core and the strength and resistance of unique and diverse local cultures. However, the debate has resulted in a number of unanswered questions. For example, how strong

will indigenous cultural influences and cultural practices continue to be? To whom do these cultures belong? How will they cope with persistent global pressures? How will cultures be maintained within a foreign environment? Will the children of subsequent generations adopt their inherited culture or adapt it to the different environment? Is it even possible under the immediacy and intensity of global media confrontation to sustain a unified sense of cultural identity?

In summary, it is clear that consumer culture is not a purely European or even Western phenomenon, although cultural globalisation has certainly enhanced the diffusion of Western consumer culture. While cultural resistance to this diffusion has been strong, there is little doubt that there is a widespread desire among many consumers in developing societies to emulate the consumer cultures of the West. Rather than an unqualified adoption of these practices, however, evidence indicates a process of adaption and hybridisation involving the appropriation of selected global cultural practices merged with local cultural practices. In many cases, severe social disruptions have occurred, yet the dominant culture has prevailed. These have occurred within a cross cultural context and, while the Fourth World has been less examined, the following section introduces examples to illustrate the practices of adoption, adaption and resistance within Second and Third World developing societies.

## 2.6 ADOPTION, ADAPTION AND RESISTANCE

Miller's (1997) ethnographic account of consumption in Trinidad is situated in a society where the native population was extinguished, then replaced by African slaves, indentured Indian and Chinese labourers and, later, Middle Eastern traders, Spanish and Portuguese planters and American immigrants. Consequently, he claimed that an authentic indigenous culture no longer existed. According to Mintz

(1985) this Caribbean 'Creole' society was developed as a periphery economy to produce and supply sugar to the dominant core countries of the world.

In his study, Miller (1997) used two imported products to illustrate the interaction between global and local forces. The first, *The Young and the Restless*, is an American soap opera; the second Coca Cola. *The Young and the Restless* has acquired cult status across all strata of society, becoming an integral part of Trinidadian popular culture, inspiring clothing fashions, a calypso dance and expressions used in daily conversation. People commonly weave the characters and story line into their daily lives and have shown an amazing ingenuity to ensure they view the daily lunch hour program. This includes the introduction of miniature television sets in shops and offices and the powering of television sets from car batteries by people living in squatter communities. While the local television programs cater to the more serious aspects of life, *The Young and the Restless* provides a medium for expressing individuality and social belonging, as well as providing pleasure through fantasy.

Coca Cola is perhaps the commodity most commonly used to illustrate global homogenisation. In Trinidad, however, its production incorporates locally produced glass, sugar and gas. More importantly, it is overwhelmingly the favoured mixer with rum, the beverage most closely associated with Trinidad's cultural identity. As such, it is historically linked with the cane fields from which modern Trinidad emerged and therefore closely associated with the sense of being Trinidadian. As Miller (1997) has argued, although it may be a global commodity, generalisations about global hegemony are false. In the case of Trinidad, at least, two global commodities have been adapted and used to promote localisation and a sense of cultural identity.

Like Miller, Wilk (1995) proposed that the global cultural system, had sustained and revitalised cultures rather than suppressed or homogenised them. In an earlier ethnographic study of Belize, a small nation granted independence from Britain in 1981, Wilk (1995) found a 'Creolised' society speaking six languages, with most people denying the existence of any culture of their own. Instead they claimed an imperfect mixture of English with Spanish, Guatemalan and a diversity of marginalised minorities. They constituted what Wilk termed an 'ethnographic blank.'

By 1990 this situation had dramatically changed. The diverse ethnic groups had merged into a 'Belizean culture' displaying an unabashed pride in locally produced products that were preferred to foreign imports. The markets were filled with local goods, including sauces, dolls' dresses and woodcrafts. There was a local music industry and restaurants advertised an 'authentic' local cuisine and sold local cookbooks. A touring national dance troupe was also established. At the same time as nine television stations beamed in foreign broadcasts, the tourist trade flourished and the stores were filled with foreign consumer goods. What was the explanation for this upsurge in localised culture in the face of global forces?

For Wilk (1995), the reason was that the global cultural system involves a hegemony of form rather than content, communicating cultural differences in a uniform and easily understood manner that expresses local cultural distinctions, boundaries and disjunctures. Using these experiences, he disputes Featherstone's (1990) contention that cultures have been commodified and homogenised. Instead, he argues the opposite has occurred; a global world has displayed real and authentic cultural differences communicated in a manner that has been understood and appreciated by others.

The developing Second World countries of Europe offer a further perspective. The overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe has been attributed as much to pent up consumer desires and their associated frustration, as it has to political factors (Kozminski 1992). Accounts of severe shortages, even of staple foods, long queues, corrupt practices by officials and a thriving black market for foreign consumer goods were common. Since the opening of barriers to entry, foreign consumer goods have flooded onto the market, while shortages of essential staple goods remain.

Prior to the brief but violent revolution of 1989, Romania had been under a communist system for almost forty five years. In an attempt to reduce national debt, the communist regime exported almost every good of value, resulting in severe shortages of food and clothing and the imposition of strict rationing. The overthrow of the government was, in many respects, directly attributable to pent up consumer desires (Kozminski 1992; Ohmae 1991).

In a comparative study of Romania and Turkey, Ger, Belk and Lascu (1993) examined changes in consumer desires following the rapid influx of scarce goods and services. They found that, in the aftermath of the Romanian revolution, there was a frenzy of buying of consumer goods. While advertising raised expectations and desires, a lack of the means of purchasing these new goods resulted in feelings of deprivation and frustration. However, the link between foreign goods and status was quickly established. For example, Romanian cigarettes were one sixth the price of the American cigarettes, yet status seeking Romanians were prepared to forego staples in order to purchase the American product. Status seeking was also sought through the acquisition of television sets and foreign consumer goods, such as sunglasses worn with the brand labels prominently displayed. Ger, Belk and Lascu (1993, p. 106) suggested that one of the greatest problems facing these consumers was that they "cannot rely on previous experience in the face of sudden change and



have no better way of knowing what to do than to imitate the 'successful' Westerners."

Other changes noted included a rise in competitive consumption, with foreign commodities becoming objects of admiration as well as envy. Frustration intensified when consumers were confronted with a widening choice of goods but lacked the wealth to purchase them. Many younger consumers complained that, while they had greater opportunities than their parents, they were also denied the opportunities for state provided services, such as free education. They claimed they were now stressed because life had become more complicated. While the desire for Western commodities had been strong enough to precipitate a political revolution, the social changes and dislocation that resulted appear to have been too rapid for many. While resistance was being voiced, it was not being practiced. Ger, Belk and Lascu (1993) noted that non-evolutionary changes, combined with internal local dynamics, resulted in an alienation between the local people, conflicts in power relationships, breakdowns in law and order, increased property crime and ethnic violence. Unlike Trinidad, changes appear to have been too rapid and dislocating, and, unlike Belize, local cultural pride is either insufficiently strong or has not yet developed.

Nor are the developing countries of the Third World without their problems. Since the opening of Nepal to the West in the nineteen fifties, tourists have introduced an array of foreign consumer goods to the local society. While benefiting the local infrastructure, such as in the roads and hospitals required for tourism, the implication of social and cultural changes in Nepal have been problematic. Sherpas, who work away from their villages, have taken on second wives, while the social status of the first wife, who is left in the village without a man, is diminished. Religious rituals have been truncated or rescheduled and children have learned to beg from tourists. While houses are more comfortable and

foreign consumer goods more readily available, there has been a shift from a reliance on community associations to self-sufficiency and individualism (Belk 1988c).

## 2.7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter commences with an historical account of the development of cultural theory before defining the two concepts of culture that are relevant to the current study (a 'whole of life' conceptualisation of culture based upon cultural materialism, and a symbolic conceptualisation based upon cultural signification). Each of these concepts provides a deeper understanding of the interacting forces involved in the spread of economic, political and cultural globalisation.

Building on this symbolic concept of culture, the second section of this chapter examines the meaning of material objects. Beginning with the notion that things have no inherent meaning, examples are provided to explain how cultural meanings are created, interpreted and shared according to cultural values. It is then shown how consumer goods play a significant role in contemporary society as mediums through which individuals indicate both a sense of social belonging and create individual identity.

In the third section of the chapter the major focus of this study (the concept of consumer culture) is closely examined. Beginning with a review of sociology, history and consumer behaviour, it is concluded that a consumer culture exists in a society when the majority of consumers desire goods and services, value them as status symbols, as means of envy provocation or as a means of pleasure fulfilment. An examination of the literature shows that there is no single point in time that can be identified as the beginning of the emergence of a consumer culture. The consumer revolution, like all revolutions, required social changes and multi-causal

developments over a significant period of time. It does appear, however, that the first sustainable consumer society can be located in eighteenth century England, although the factors that enabled the contemporary consumer societies to become established were to take at least a further century. An understanding of the complex factors enabling the emergence of contemporary consumer societies is essential to understanding what has occurred in the communities upon which the present study is based.

The penultimate section of this chapter examines the theories put forward to explain and predict sustained economic development so that the policies implemented within the remote Aboriginal communities can be understood. This is followed by an examination of economic and political globalisation and the more recent phenomena of cultural globalisation, or the diffusion through mass communication of a global cultural system.

The final section uses examples of the impact of this global cultural system to emphasise the diversity of local responses, showing not the often predicted wholesale adoption associated with cultural hegemony, but examples of cultural resistance, adaption and syncretisation. While recognising the power imbalances in favour of the dominant and more affluent cultures, it is shown that developing countries have merged old and new cultural meanings, transforming and negotiating them into unique new meanings. It is also shown that these practices have not been without disruptions, social conflicts, contradictions and differential outcomes. Before responses within the three remote Fourth World Aboriginal communities of this study can be examined, however, it is necessary to understand the tradition-oriented cultures that existed and the historical, economic and political forces that have impacted upon them during the hundred years of European settlement.

## Endnotes

1. There are no commonly accepted terms to describe the diverse cultural theories that have evolved during the twentieth century. Barrett (1984) for example, lists thirty eight theoretical orientations within anthropology and categorises these into seven clusters displaying commonalities. According to Barrett's categorisation, Evolutionism includes; early evolution, cultural materialism and cultural ecology; Durkheim's functionalism is a subset of Structural Functionalism; Structuralism is based around the work of Levi-Strauss; and symbolic anthropology is subsumed within Psychological Anthropology. Other texts use different labels for these orientations.
2. These terms are derived from linguistics. Emic views (from phonemic) explain observed behaviours using constructs from within the culture being observed (natives viewpoint), while etic views (from phonetic) use criteria imposed by the researcher to generate universal categories.
3. *Function* refers to the role of customs and behavioural patterns in determining the social relationships between members of a group while *Structure* refers to the configuration or social structure of a group, such as kinship patterns.
4. *Commodification* refers to the process of turning an object into something for consumption. This often involves redefining its meaning. Alternatively, the process of *decommodification* involves stripping consumer goods of their commodity status. *Recommodification* of consumer goods occurs when goods are altered in some way to infuse them with additional meaning. Such goods may increase in economic value if they are infused with sacred meanings due to association with important people or events.

5. The term *cultural hegemony* signifies the dominance of a single group in shaping the prevailing world view. It was used to describe the social order of the Soviet Union and later adapted to describe the domination of the ruling classes under capitalism. Its most recent use has been to describe the spread of global consumption patterns by the mass media.
6. Sensibility in eighteenth century terms referred to virtuous feelings and benevolence as opposed to a prudent mind. Typically it covered feeling sorry for oneself and others and being moved by beauty.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TRADITION AND CHANGE

*They did not know the meaning of the word nakedness until the 'white' man flung a pair of trousers at the feet of his Aboriginal non-paid servant and ordered him to don them. Then the sheep and cattle made their impact on the land, they bred by the millions. No modern machinery could ever do such damage to the Aboriginal food supply as those vast hordes. With his sustenance fast diminishing, he was driven away from his precious pools and waterholes by whip, chain and gun. ....For the occasional spearing of one 'white' man, whole tribes were wiped out of existence. Unable to grasp the 'white' man's time concepts, he was labelled indolent and unreliable. As an Aboriginal name was difficult for the 'white' man to pronounce, he was usually named after some insignificant accoutrement belonging to his 'white master', such as Tommy Quarterpot, Boxer, Flourbag, etc., thus denigrating the Aboriginal even further (Davis 1982).*

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

While 60,000 year old Aboriginal rock art has been described as the world's earliest ontological reflection (Swain 1993), the recording of history is not an Aboriginal concept. The history of the Australian Aborigine only began with European settlement and is a European version of events. In fact, Swain noted that Aborigines were virtually non-existent in Australian historical accounts until the nineteen sixties, an oversight dubbed by Stanner (1979) as the 'Great Australian Silence'. What is termed 'traditional' Aboriginal lifestyle, is not what existed at the so called 'dawn of time' but what was recorded by Europeans (Urry 1979). Knowledge of Aboriginal history has been developed through a number of sources and with a variation in focus over the period since European contact (Attwood 1989; Kidd 1997; Markus 1990; Reynolds 1989). The following section briefly summarises the evolution of this knowledge.

Understanding traditional Australian Aboriginal culture and lifestyle has been of central interest within the discipline of anthropology since Europeans first became aware of their existence. Indeed, it has been claimed that the entire history of anthropological thought and theory construction can be explained in terms of Aboriginal Australia (Yengoyan 1979). It was noted in the previous chapter that the European concept of human evolution comprised an ethnographic comparison of 'savage' with 'civilised' cultures. Rennie (1995) argued that Euro-centric thinking of the time was that the discovery of a place remote from 'civilised' culture was analogous to finding a 'primitive' culture, remote in time. This is confirmed by Yengoyan (1979) who argued that, while European cultures were perceived as representative of 'civilised man', Australian Aboriginal culture was considered by anthropologists as the perfect living laboratory for the study of the 'uncivilised' or 'savage' other. He wrote:

*If cultural distance is conceived of as the other extreme from Western Culture, surely a cultural system which has complex cosmologies, superincision, tooth evulsion, body scarification, denial of physiological paternity, mythic time, totemism, and elaborate marriage systems, all of which are combined in various ways in each culture, would emerge as the prime candidate for the 'ideal other' (Yengoyan 1979).*

While early coastal and inland explorers of the Australian continent observed and reported on Aboriginal lifestyle, scientific anthropological research did not commence until the second decade of this century. By this time most of what we now term traditional Aboriginal culture had already been largely destroyed. As a result, little is known about whole areas of pre-contact Aboriginal behaviour. In addition, the focus of anthropological research has altered over the seventy years in which it has been conducted. Durkheim (1938/1895) focused on developing theories for the general nature of society while Malinowski (1913) and Radcliffe-Brown (1931) focused on social relationships within Aboriginal society. Following the emergence of anthropological interest in mythology, cosmology, religion and psychology, a new wave of ethnographic fieldwork was conducted from the 1930s through to the 1960s. Elkin (1932, 1964) worked in the Western Desert and the Kimberley and Stanner (1960, 1965, 1979) in Eastern Arnhem land and the Port Keats (Wadeye) area. In these more remote locations, geographical distance had lessened the degree of cultural destruction. Both researchers concentrated on religion, totemism and kinship patterns. Roheim (1945) embraced Freudian psychology, while the Berndts (1946, 1965, 1992) worked for fifty years across a wide variety of theoretical perspectives. More recently, Butlin (1995) provided a controversial economic interpretation of pre-settlement Aboriginal life, while Blainey (1975) and Reynolds (1982, 1989) produced historical accounts of the conflict between traditional Aboriginal lifestyles and European values.



To complicate matters further, attempted cultural destruction continued at an even more rapid rate and, by the 1960s, anthropologists were stating that only 'salvage ethnography' was possible because cosmological beliefs, traditional socio-economic organisation, modes of hunting, and tribal social structures had been destroyed (Keen 1988). The last thirty years has produced a new wave of theories, some challenging those enunciated in the classical works. The most recent studies have focused on the cultural adaption of Aboriginal cosmologies and belief systems, and economic self-determination (Yengoyan 1979). Keen (1988) undertook an ecological perspective, Akerman (1979) an analysis of Aboriginal economic life, while Michaels (1988) addressed the impact of global technology on contemporary rural Aborigines. Kolig (1981,1988) and Swain (1993) specialised in Aboriginal religion and the history of Aboriginal being.

It should also be acknowledged that, prior to European contact, the hunter gatherer strategy of non-sedentary, small group habitation, with its inherent geographical isolation, resulted in enormous diversity of cultures and lifestyles between Aboriginal groups across Australia. This means that a precise generalised description of pre-contact Aboriginal culture and lifestyle is not plausible. There is, however, agreement on general social structure, together with the purposes, functions and philosophies of pre-contact Aboriginal lifestyle, and this chapter outlines these. The analysis incorporates anthropological research conducted in the areas specific to this study, namely the work of Elkin (1932,1964) and Robinson (1973) on the Dampier peninsular and that of Stanner (1960, 1965, 1979) in the Wadeye region.

## 3.2 TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL CULTURE

By most accounts traditional Aboriginal societies and cultures were complex. These societies comprised deeply religious, intelligent human beings with sophisticated belief and value systems that formed the basis of social interaction and defined acceptable behaviour patterns (Berndt and Berndt 1965). They were based upon deep emotional attachment to the land, which was central to their entire existence. They had well defined strategies for group sizes and location, the distribution of food and sophisticated ideals of exchange, sharing and reciprocity (Berndt and Berndt 1992). Their economic survival was dependent on a hunter-gatherer economy, with a diversity of methods adapted to their environment and providing, in most circumstances, a nutritious standard of existence (Akerman, 1979; Butlin 1995). They developed tools for food collection which were simple in technology yet more sophisticated than those employed by most agricultural societies at that time (Satterwait, 1980). Finally, they developed a sophisticated education system that ensured the preservation of their culture and lifestyle (Dingle 1988). In the following sections, three aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture will be considered; namely economic life and consumption; kinship and social organisation; and religion, myth and symbolism.

### 3.2.1 ECONOMIC LIFE AND CONSUMPTION

From the earliest days of European contact, the aspect of Aboriginal culture singled out for the greatest attention by academics was the pattern of economic life, or the productive activities and consumption practices by which survival was ensured (Butlin 1995). The eighteenth century notion of the 'noble savage' living in an idyllic economic state was tempered by accounts of Australian Aboriginal life with its primitive hunting and gathering, unsophisticated technology, minimal levels of specialisation and implied low intellectual capacity. To Europeans, who had

adopted an urbanised, sedentary lifestyle with permanent shelter and agricultural cultivation, the Aboriginal economic lifestyle must have been incomprehensible (Dingle 1988). The Aborigine could hardly have been subjugated by a people more different than themselves. Little wonder that most nineteenth century European theorists exemplified the Australian Aborigine as the lowest level of their human evolutionary hierarchy.

Economic activities and associated social structures relevant to Aboriginal subsistence, however, have proven to be the most difficult cultural elements to analyse because they were the first to be destroyed following the arrival of the Europeans. Indeed, much of the work on Aboriginal economic life and consumption patterns has come from archaeological rather than anthropological studies (Anderson 1988). More recently, cultural ecologists have emphasised the inter-relationship between environmental features and socio-cultural institutions on economic life (Gould 1982; Tindale 1974). By considering the adaption of economic life and socio-cultural institutions as a response to environmental forces, they have produced a more integrated view of Aboriginal economic life than earlier anthropologists (Anderson 1988). Central to this ecological notion of economic life among hunter-gatherer groups, are food resources and social organisation.

Consideration of food resources included the influence of ecological factors, such as seasonality, on diet; methods of food procurement and preparation; the technology associated with food production and preparation; specialisation and rules for the division of tasks; the composition of task groups; time spent in particular activities; the sharing and distribution of food; and the use of ceremonies and rituals as socialising agents for these production and consumption-related activities.

Traditional economic life was premised on adaptive behaviour in accordance with ecological factors. The diet was primarily vegetarian and meat intake varied with rainfall and water availability or, in the case of coastal inhabitants, with seasonal variation in seafoods. As mobility was essential to survival, foraging, followed by immediate relaxation, was preferred to storage. Like most hunter gatherer societies the basis of the Aboriginal economy was the collection of vegetables, fruits, roots and nuts, supplemented with meat from animals or fish (Akerman 1979).

In most studies, women are depicted as steady and predictable gatherers of the immobile goods and men as the hunters of mobile and less predictable larger game. Generally, specialisation involved men in the hunting of larger animals, as women were usually forbidden to carry weapons (Biskup 1973). Women were responsible for foraging for vegetables and smaller animals, firewood and water. Men were responsible for the building of any required shelter and women for the preparation of the food. Male and female responsibilities for food production was almost equal over the seasonal cycle (Akerman 1979).

There has been some research on the time requirements for food production in traditional Aboriginal society (McCarthy and McArthur 1960; Altman 1984) but the suggested requirements range between three and eight hours per day. Sahlins (1972) questioned the assumption that hunter-gatherer economies were perpetually on the verge of starvation with little time for leisure activities. He distinguishes between two kinds of affluence; the 'Galbraithian affluence' of the market economies, in which limited production cannot satisfy needs and affluence is consequently measured in terms of production levels, compared to the 'Zen affluence' in which the accumulation of material goods is unimportant and affluence is measured in terms of available leisure time. Hunter-gatherers such as the Australian Aborigine, Sahlins suggested, belonged with this latter group and

comprised the 'original affluent society'. Evidence from Arnhem land, however, where food was relatively abundant and collection time relatively short, suggests that Sahlins may have overestimated the amount of leisure time available in traditional Aboriginal economic life and that the concept of affluence is a contemporary European phenomenon (Altman 1984).

There is some debate as to whether distribution among hunter gatherer societies is related to production or kinship. Sahlins(1972) argued that distribution was based upon kinship, utilising generalised reciprocity in which repayment was not expected. Meillassoux (1973), however, proposed an opposing viewpoint, with shared distribution resulting from an inability to store food. Both theories are defensible. In traditional Aboriginal societies there was a wide divergence in sharing practices. It seems that the sharing of large animals between hunter and clan was regulated by strict rules based upon kinship obligations. Smaller game was shared among the immediate household only. The incidence of sharing increased during periods of food scarcity and the congregation of clans into larger groups.

While material possessions seemed of less significance to Aborigines than Europeans, individual ownership was still observed, particularly with regard to weapons, food gathering utensils, and sacred objects. In general, there was a deeply enshrined sharing ethos, central to survival. This involved a network of commitments, duties and debts, based upon balanced reciprocity within a certain period. There is also evidence of social obligations to exchange gifts governed by complex rules regarding the direction in which gifts were to travel, and with disapproval and sanctions for non-reciprocity (Thompson 1949). It was also observed that the act of giving was more important than the gift itself (Stanner 1979). The purpose of the gift included the settlement of grievances, the initiation of friendships, and ceremony inclusion (Berndt 1992).

### 3.2.2 KINSHIP AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Three paradigms exist for analysing Aboriginal kinship and social organisation. The initial paradigm, developed by Radcliffe-Brown (1931), is based upon sets of rules and genealogical connections formed around the family unit and the "horde" (small groups who resided and hunted together). The horde was grouped according to gender and age and consisted of males, their wives, their children and the males' unmarried sisters. These hordes were, in turn, grouped into clans sharing a common language and customs. Descent was universally patrilineal. Radcliffe-Brown believed kinship systems to be similar in structure but with local variations in marriage rules and lines of descent.

The second paradigm, alliance theory, originated from the work of Levi-Strauss (1969) and involves the relationship between kinship and the whole of Aboriginal culture and cosmology. Levi-Strauss conceived kinship as a social system based upon a man, his wife, their children, the man's unmarried sisters, and his wife's brothers. Exchanges involved goods, messages and women. Marriage exchange evolved for the prohibition of incest and the mutual dependency of families. In 'harmonic regimes' rules of descent and residence may be either patrilineal and patrilocal, or matrilineal and matrilocal. Within 'disharmonic regimes' either descent is patrilineal and residence matrilocal, or descent matrilineal and residence patrilocal.

The third, and most recent, paradigm is concerned with how kinship and social structure are constrained by ecological factors. These will be considered in the following analysis.

Hunter-gatherer economies are generally described as ones in which output is available for immediate consumption and based upon a sharing ethos that is free from allegiance. Such economies require access to land and rights to shared

resources but have little need for either a social hierarchy or centralised power (Meillassoux 1972). All of these societies, however, must resolve the balance between two conflicting pressures; those that reinforce the integrity of local groups and those that foster co-operation between groups. Maintaining the integrity of local groups requires the exclusion of outsiders and the protection of sacred and ancestral sites. The co-operation required between groups to enable mobility and survival necessitates exchange and obligation through trade, marriage, and ritual, plus flexibility in the size, composition, and movement of groups (Tonkinson 1974).

Analysis of Aboriginal group organisation related to consumption must include the numerical size and geographical range of groups and their ownership and access to land. Local groups of common descent, probably comprising between twenty and fifty persons at most times, resided within areas physically identified by natural features that were ascribed totemic meanings. These local groups had common and distinct land rights and were sometimes further divided into smaller food seeking groups. They were also part of loosely bounded regional networks based upon patrilineal or matrilineal descent. These larger groups may or may not have common ancestors but usually shared common language and belief systems. They did not necessarily share ancestral lands or sacred sites.

To explain land use entitlements, Stanner (1965) introduced the concept of estates and ranges. Estates were sacred localities and the ancestral homes of local totemic groups, or clans, while the range comprised common land that these smaller clans could cross for purposes of economic exploitation. Stanner noted that there was considerable variation in the structure, composition and mobility of residential units, or local clans, due to regional and seasonal differences. The border areas of local groups intersected but were not rigid and clans could cross the estates of others for the purpose of mutual exploitation of resources, conditional upon the

avoidance of sacred ancestral sites. Ecological factors were important in determining the size of clans, especially the abundance of food resources and water supplies, which determined human dispersal and mobility.

While Aborigines depended on their immediate environment for raw materials, some requirements were acquired through the medium of trade with other groups. This involved a sophisticated network reaching across the entire continent, as Akerman explains:

*Originally trade routes lay like a fine mesh over the land, representing a network of interaction which traditionally linked many differently oriented cultural and language groups. Goods moved initially within the range of recognised kin and then to defined partners living in adjacent territories, and then farther afield, travelling clockwise or anticlockwise, according to the convention<sup>1</sup> (1979, p.250).*

The stability of local clan structures did not derive solely from environmental and economic factors, however. It also derived from totemic and religious philosophies. Totemic relationships were not merely religious. Restrictions on the eating of totemic animals, for example, were a means of minimising environmental risk. While local clans shared totemic beliefs closely related to their land, they were also patrilineal and exogamous<sup>2</sup> and therefore interconnected to the wider group of the estate through kinship bonds.

### **Gender relationships**

In traditional Aboriginal society, power devolved to males through their control of economic and sacred domains. While women were the major providers of daily sustenance, materials and medicines, males controlled distribution and indeed the allocation of women themselves as economic resources (Rose 1987). While women had their own sacred rituals, males controlled Aboriginal law and its enforcement



(Berndt 1992). Women were responsible for overseeing mourning rituals, including displays of public grief and, while they had their own sacred sites and initiation practices, male sacred sites were more sacrosanct and male initiation rituals were considered more important to both males and females. While men entered adulthood through initiation ceremonies involving the revelation of their identities, women achieved this through the agency of men (Williams 1992).

Aboriginal society provided separate living areas for male, female and family groups and, while each gender had independent responsibilities and lived within different spheres, they were united through obligations involving food production and distribution and the socialisation of children. When required, female sexuality was at the disposal of the community and utilised for the purpose of socialisation with outsiders. Reciprocity in marriage arrangements and sexual obligation were fundamental to Aboriginal society and considered temporary gifts linked with land and spirituality (Swain 1993).

Different notions of reciprocity, however, led to conflict during involvement with Macassans traders and, later, with European settlers. With no understanding of Aboriginal gender relationships, Europeans saw Aboriginal women as slaves and their sexual diplomacy as prostitution. (Williams 1992). With a shortage of European women, Aboriginal women became sexual commodities, traded and exploited by economically more powerful European males. While Aboriginal males were powerless to prevent this behaviour, the ability of their women to attract European males altered the gender balance of power. At the same time, European women's control of their sexuality acted as yet another symbol of racial superiority (Hunt 1986). Missions exacerbated the situation further by challenging Aboriginal practices of polygyny and denying the rights of older Aboriginal males to young women (Hunter 1993). In addition to becoming chattels of European males, Aboriginal women lived in an environment of squalor, disease and malnutrition

previously unknown (Williams 1992). This gender imbalance and exploitation of Aboriginal women has been placed in perspective by Abbie (1970), however. While conceding that hardships were undeniable, he questions whether such oppression and slavery was any less prevalent among the underprivileged women of European societies at the same time.

### 3.2.3 RELIGION, MYTH AND SYMBOLISM

Possibly the most insightful understanding of Aboriginal religion, rites and beliefs was developed by Stanner who proposed that religion was central to Aboriginal life. In stressing its vitality he suggests that:

*If 'religion' means, as its probable etymology suggests, two dispositions in man - to ponder on the foundations of human life in history, and to unite or reconcile oneself with the design incorporated in those foundations- then the Aborigines were a very religious minded people (Stanner, 1965, p. 74).*

Christian theology is predicated on the dichotomous relationships between spiritual and material, damnation and salvation, plus sacred and profane. These concepts are not appropriate to an understanding of Aboriginal religion. Aboriginal beliefs are based on the causative forces of the Dreaming,<sup>3</sup> an immense store of meanings explaining existence in terms of the physical landscape. Myth and totemic symbols form the basis of the Dreaming, with every feature of the landscape and every living creature having a well-developed story to explain its being. Myths permeate all aspects of Aboriginal culture, giving meaning to human action, and are manifested in ritual, music, art and language. Stanner wrote:

*When the myths about the drama of the Dream Time are studied with care it becomes clear that the Aborigines had taken, indeed had gone far beyond, the longest and most difficult step toward the formation of a truly religious outlook. They had found in the world about them what they took to be signs of intent toward men, and they had transformed those signs into assurances of life under mystical nurture. Their symbolic observances toward the signs, in rites of several kinds, were in essence acts of faith toward the ground of that assurance (Stanner 1965, p. 74).*

Aboriginal beliefs were based upon the notion that social, economic and ritual life was ordained during the creative period of the Dreaming when anthropomorphic beings roamed across the land creating natural features and filling the land with spirituality which remains potent to this present day. These spiritual links to the land are therefore a contemporary actuality as much as an historical explanation of creation (Dixon and Dillon 1990).

Aboriginal philosophy, as manifest in their myth, totemism and cosmology, was premised upon the continual interaction of natural and supernatural forces, in contrast to the distinction found in Western philosophy. Aborigines defined their very being in terms of place or space, rather than time. Their supernatural beings were not living in some heaven beyond human reach but were dwelling in their very midst, and had done so from all eternity (Strehlow 1965).

The Australian Aborigines had well developed systems of law based upon the Dreaming and, although variations existed from one group to another, there were strong commonalities (Bourke and Cox 1998). Aboriginal law prescribed daily social behaviour and children were enculturated into socially appropriate forms of behaviour. The law was enforced within groups by elders while intra-group enforcement was settled when groups came together for ceremonial gatherings (Berndt 1992). Traditional law covered issues such as sorcery, incest, the

abduction of women, adultery, assault, insult, theft and the failure to share food (Edwards 1988). There was virtually no privacy and social behaviour was a public activity, therefore, it was almost impossible to break the law without others being aware. The range of penalties inflicted for breaking the law included ridicule, wounding and death (Edwards 1988).

In Aboriginal culture, land ownership, land use and access to the land, as well as structure, livelihood and emotional support within groups, was a spiritual phenomenon related to the whole question of existence and being. Aboriginal law provided a number of concurrent rights for land ownership. Patrilineal inheritance ensured ownership of the land and its resources but also imposed obligations to protect and care for the land, its resources and its inherent spiritual associations. Hence control was as important as possession (Coombs et al 1989). Subsidiary ownership was conferred through either an individual's place of conception or a kin's place of death. It was also important for people to die in their 'own country'. The basis of spatial mobility and existence was expressed through religious ties to the land (Yengoyen 1979).

Following the Australian High Court's Mabo ruling, research associated with the preparation of land claims revealed a greater diversity in Aboriginal social organisation than was previously realised. Claims to land ownership are now being made on the basis of conception, birth, initiation, and father's and mother's place of conception, birth, or death.

### 3.2.4 TRADITION-ORIENTED BARDI LIFE

The Kalumburu and Wadeye sites are illustrative of the missionary practices of amalgamating Aboriginal people irrespective of cultural diversity or language differences. As a result, neither site retained tradition-oriented cultures which were representative of their pre-contract lifestyle. On the Dampier peninsular, however,

the opposite occurred, with the dominant Bardi culture being divided between a number of missionary locations. For this reason the culture, while dramatically changed, retained basic traditional elements. The brief description of tradition-oriented Bardi life which follows exemplifies food production and consumption, local group organisation, socialising ceremonies and the allocation of resources. It is essential to stress, however, that this description is included to enhance understanding of the inter-relationship between these aspects rather than a generalised account of traditional Aboriginal lifestyle.

The Bardi employed a hunting and gathering system similar to the economic system of other Kimberley tribes, although predictably they placed greater emphasis on seafoods and devised specialised technology to exploit these ocean resources. Elkin (1964) described the Bardi social structure as unique because their local group organisation seemingly lacked a totemic framework while their kinship systems diverged from others in matters of both descent and marriage rules and also lacked subsections and patrilineal moieties. Robinson (1973) suggested that, while Bardi religious beliefs were based on the exploits of local ancestral beings, their ritual structure and local organisation differed only marginally from other groups.

Perhaps the greatest ecological factor impacting on Aboriginal food resources was seasonal variation. The Bardi concept of seasonality was one of the most complex in the Kimberley, comprising six seasons which were distinguished by rainfall, the direction and intensity of wind, the appearance and ripening of fruits, and the appearance, disappearance and physical condition of fish and animals. While comprising an abundance of fish throughout most of the year, the Bardi diet was supplemented by yams and fruit when they became abundant immediately following 'the wet' and shellfish, reef oysters and turtles during the subsequent season. In the rainy monsoonal season, when fish were in low supply, the Bardi moved from coastal to inland areas and incorporated bush fruits, honey, goanna,

wallaby and possum into their diets (Smith and Kaslotas 1985).

In addition to hunting and gathering skills, the Bardi were adept at fishing from shoreline, reef, and seagoing canoe, using spears and fishing boomerangs. Their most efficient means of fishing, however, was the stone fish trap. This comprised a stone wall constructed across tidal areas to trap fish during high tide, enabling collection as the tide receded. Fish were also temporarily stunned by the addition to the water of a ground root that was poisonous (Smith and Kaslotas 1985).

The Bardi occupied the northernmost tip of the Dampier peninsular and comprised forty six *buru*<sup>4</sup> situated near the coast and physically identified by some natural feature such as water hole, beach, group of rocks or treeline (Robinson 1973). These patrilineal descent groups were exogamous and, following marriage, the male spent a brief period living and hunting with members of his wife's *buru* prior to returning to his ancestral land.

While the male made numerous returns to his wife's *buru* as part of the strong inter-group network of social interaction, it was important that his children were born in his own patrilineal territory and that he himself died there. Natural disasters, diseases and lack of male children resulted in the demise of some *buru*, but these were later re-established following overpopulation or internal disputes within other *buru*. The larger Bardi 'estate' was religiously defined by the spiritual association of mythological 'spirit familiars'<sup>5</sup> believed to inhabit individuals within each of the component *burus*.

Unlike other Kimberley groups, the Bardi have no moieties or sections. Bardi marriage rules emphasise that marriage is only possible between kin in the same generation level and that a man's preferred wife is the daughter of either his mother's brother or his mother's mother's brother's son (Robinson 1973).

### 3.2.5 THE SHARING ETHOS

Despite the widespread belief that the sharing of food and material goods was, and indeed remains, universal within Aboriginal culture, like all other facets of Aboriginal culture the concept of sharing differed across Aboriginal Australia. There was, however, an underlying rationale and pattern of rules for the implementation and preservation of sharing principles. The following account is based upon research conducted by Altman (1987), Berndt (1992) and Stanner (1979) within northern coastal Aboriginal communities.

Despite the need for sharing and reciprocity to ensure survival in an ecology of limited resources, there never was an ethos of 'sharing everything equally' in Aboriginal society. Firstly, the rules for sharing were different for food and material goods. Likewise, rules changed as seasonal cycles dictated place of residence, community size and type and abundance of food. The prestige of the food, its visibility to others and the person responsible for hunting or gathering the food were also factors that determined allocation. Likewise, sharing was not only a means of food distribution but also a means of allocating production tasks and satisfying obligations to others. Indeed, group cohesion was maintained through patterns of reciprocation and obligation. While women supplied the majority of the predictable food supply for sustenance, the food men hunted was mainly used to maintain social obligations and fulfil ritual obligations (Berndt 1992).

In some instances the rules were closely followed, such as the killing of a large prestigious animal by a senior hunter. In this instance the food would be allocated according to social position and body parts. For example, if it were a kangaroo, the head and forequarters would usually go to the hunter, the hind-quarters to the senior man of the household and the remainder according to kinship links. The immediate household were given first priority, followed by kin and, when there was a surplus, sharing went further afield. On other occasions ad hoc decisions

were made, but it appears that equity was usually central to these. For example, if a hunter secured more than one kangaroo, a more generous and widespread sharing was expected. With smaller animals sharing was often restricted to the immediate household and, often, food was consumed immediately, rather than being brought back to the community.

It was considered inappropriate behaviour to linger near others when food was being cooked and to ask for or steal food. Inevitably, disputes did arise but outright conflict was rare as it was considered unacceptable to fight over food. Instead, devious behaviour and gossip were practiced. Lying was considered preferable to anger or conflict and talking about others was regarded as another means of avoiding anger.

The rules for the sharing of material goods was different to those for food, especially where survival was not an important issue. When weapons, or indeed land, were shared for hunting purposes, an obligation to share whatever resulted from their use was expected. This was a major incentive for sharing these weapons and has been proposed as the basis for sharing obligations that are attached to contemporary functional goods, such as motor vehicles, motor boats, rifles and spear guns (Altman 1987).

Following settlement, problems arose because of the dichotomy between European and Aboriginal ways of controlling the distribution of food and material goods, particularly cash and market goods that had not existed in traditional Aboriginal society. With durable goods, such as rifles, video recorders, cassette players and motorised vehicles, there is a strong expectation that they will be shared communally. While the sharing of bush food in traditional society overcame perishability, most contemporary market foods are not subject to this problem and are more exchangeable. However, kinship obligations and a desire for social harmony have resulted in a strong food sharing ethos continuing. The same ethos



exists with clothing.

Cash is shared even more than market foods, although there appears to be a distinction between regular welfare cash and cash earned through the sale of art and craft, which is more carefully controlled (Altman 1987). Cash is readily asked for, and given, especially on occasions such as the arrival of food supplies in remote areas. Although no records are kept, a balanced reciprocity appears to exist. Communal gambling and alcohol drinking are the other major occasions for sharing of cash. Again, there is a strong ethos to share with those who do not possess cash and, while a balanced reciprocity prevails over time, those who continually request cash without reciprocating are avoided. While gambling and drinking are considered occasions for leisure, excitement and social cohesion, they more often result in dissension, conflict and dispersion. In many instances, inequitable distribution is a factor.

### 3.3 EARLY CONTACT

It is now generally accepted that the Aboriginal occupation of the Australian continent commenced at least 60,000 years ago<sup>6</sup> and that the indigenous inhabitants restricted population growth, within the limits of accessible natural resources, to around 300,000 people<sup>7</sup>.

This population level appears to have prevailed until European occupation (Snooks 1994). Some argue that, immediately prior to European occupation, the material standard of living of the Australian Aborigine was relatively high by European standards<sup>8</sup> (Blainey 1975). More than five hundred languages existed, with extensive vocabularies and grammatical features as complex as the classical languages of Europe (Elkin 1964).

Within a century of European settlement, the Aboriginal population had been reduced to around 50,000 with at least 20,000 alone being massacred as a result of frontier conflicts and a further 200,000 succumbing to either introduced European diseases, or malnutrition arising from the elimination of food sources. The number of operational languages was halved, the standard of material well-being markedly reduced, and the indigenous Aboriginal culture devastated (Reynolds 1982).

Although nationalist Australian mythology contends that the continent was "discovered" by Captain James Cook in 1780, Aborigines in the north had previous contact with Macassans, Indonesians, and Melanesians for at least several hundred years before that (Kolig 1981; Swain 1994). However, this contact was occasional and took the form of trade and semi-permanent settlements rather than colonisation, thus leaving Aborigines in control.

The Macassans traded iron tools, cloth, alcohol, tobacco and rice with the Aborigines in exchange for sea cucumbers, pearls, pearl and tortoise shells, and the sexual favours of their women (Pannell 1993). This trade was limited to coastal areas of the north and had little noticeable impact on Aboriginal lifestyles before European contact.

For instance, the agriculture of these visitors was not adopted by Aborigines. Likewise, rock paintings in the Northern Territory show depictions of Macassan sailing ships, but there is no evidence of Aboriginal adoption of such ships, although the dugout canoe may have been adopted from them (Swain 1993). The residual impact on Aboriginal material culture was also slight and appears to have been absorbed non-traumatically (Kolig 1981).

Overall relationships were cordial and the Aborigines addressed the Macassans as brother, uncle or father, although the dilemma was that they were not and could not be accommodated within the kin system (Hunter 1993). Consequently, there could be no permanent relationship through marriage or belonging to the land.

There were disputes and occasional violence resulting from either intoxication, sexual relations without proper consent, or an alleged failure to fully reciprocate in trade agreements (Swain 1993). Generally, however, there was neither an imperialistic nor religious zeal on the part of these outsiders to change Aboriginal culture. With the European invasion, however, both the motives and scale of outside contact changed substantially.

While the earliest European contacts with the Australian Aborigines remain uncertain, the first recorded contact by the English is attributed to Dampier, a British explorer and privateer who spent some time among the Bardi in 1698 while conducting repairs to his vessel. Dampier recorded accounts of Bardi economic and social life and almost every account of early contact between Aborigines and Europeans quotes from these journals, particularly his comment that the, "inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the world" (Dampier 1699)<sup>9</sup>

What is less commonly quoted is the Aboriginal attitude to Dampier and their reference to him as *ngaarri*, a mythical Bardi creature who accounted for many of the misfortunes of the Bardi people by seeking to kill or injure them (Metcalf 1976). Dampier's contact resulted in the spearing of a sailor and the retaliatory shooting of an Aborigine. This is the first recorded casualty of British contact (Hunter 1993). Subsequent coastal exploration culminated in British colonisation of the continent in 1788, rapidly followed by inland exploration and settlement.

### 3.4 OCCUPATION AND DISPOSSESSION

While explorers had little enduring impact upon the Aborigines, the occupation and appropriation of land by settlers resulted in intense confrontation. The most pronounced early contact, following occupation of the western half of the Australian continent, was from pearlers, pastoralists, miners, and Christian

missions. Historically, the economic opportunism represented by these people, especially given their demand on the resources of land and labour, represented key points of contact and conflict with Aborigines. In each case Aboriginal material culture was intentionally altered and consumer goods used, sometimes in combination with physical force, to achieve compliance with European wishes.

In the following sections, the impact on Aboriginal culture and lifestyle of those involved in private opportunism, government institutions and the missions, will be examined. Special attention will be paid to their impact on the people of the Kimberley and Western Arnhemland.

### 3.4.1 THE PEARLERS

In many respects, sea based economic activities such as sealing, whaling, pearling and *bêche de mer* (worm of the sea) collection, were less disruptive to Aboriginal economic life than pastoralism or mining. They did not involve expropriation of land yet provided mutual benefits through trade (Reynolds 1981). As these activities were usually conducted in remote areas, this resulted in further problems for nearby Aborigines who were regarded as a source of cheap labour.

When the pearling industry developed in Broome during the 1870s, the demand for labour remained high due to high mortality rates, particularly prior to the arrival of the diving suit and air pumps (Hunter 1993). Raiding parties scoured the countryside taking large numbers of young Aborigines, many being forced onto luggers at 'the point of a gun' (Elkin 1964). During the 1880s, these practices were legalised through an indenture system, and as many as half of the Aboriginal children of Broome were involved.<sup>10</sup> Some young Aboriginal men joined the luggers willingly, either to escape impending tribal punishments for previous wrong doings or because they were convinced to join by elders, who could then retain control and use of the women (Reynolds 1982).

European and Asian crewmen sought Aboriginal women for sexual gratification and women were either abducted or willingly exchanged by Aboriginal males in return for European consumer items, particularly tobacco gin and rations (Elkin 1964). The Aborigines Act of 1905 was introduced to 'protect' Aboriginal women, by restricting their presence within two miles of pearling camps, and banning inter-racial cohabitation. However, this had little effect on the abuse of local women (Reynolds 1982). The greatest abuse occurred among the Bardi, where Roth reported women returning from pearling luggers during the day with rice and other gifts (Elkin 1964).

Prostitution was openly practiced in Broome and its social impact was enduring as the mixed blood population grew rapidly, resulting in three distinct racial groups with different cultures (Hunter 1993). There was virtually no official control and a Royal Commission was established to report on the situation. The following excerpt from this Royal Commission reveals the extent of the problem:

*There was nothing to prevent the greatest scoundrel unhung, European or Asiatic, putting under contract any black he pleases...Employers can work natives without a contract...Wages are not stipulated. Police are invoked to bring runaway (workers) back. Employers have benefited themselves pecuniarily by hiring the services of their Aboriginal employees to others. At Broome, quite half the children (from ten years upwards) are indentured to the pearling industry and taken out on the boats...and the chief Protector cannot prevent this (Roth 1904, p. 4).*

### 3.4.2 THE PASTORALISTS

The impact of the pastoral industry is closely entwined with that of pearling, the relationship defined by remoteness and reliance on Aboriginal labour (Hunt 1986). Beginning from 1884, and lasting until the First World War, the eastern Kimberley was settled from the Ord River through to Derby by pastoralists crossing the continent from the east. Contrary to contemporary stereotypes, the Aborigines were not passive bystanders as their ecology and traditional economy were disrupted and their water and food resources appropriated (Birkup 1973). They were highly militant and mounted armed resistance against the intruders. As food supplies were diminished through competition from cattle, the Aborigines retaliated by spearing both cattle and settlers (Reynolds 1989).

Neither were the Aborigines passive in terms of adaption or the adoption of new food sources or food gathering technologies. While cattle were initially killed at random in an attempt to resist European development, the Aborigines quickly learned to adapt their hunting technology and skills, and their diet, to accommodate these new food sources. Steel tips were added to spears which had been capable of killing kangaroos but could not cope with cattle. Dogs were trained to assist in hunting.

The stealing and hostility threatened the viability of the pastoral industry. The government was placed in the dilemma of being responsible for both 'native welfare' and the safety of settlers. Reaction was swift and violent as the power to respond was relocated to local police and the new landowners. Fear, deception, violence and retaliation were common ingredients in a process of localised genocide pursued by Europeans and Asians. The region was "tamed with gun, strychnine, horse, chain and dog" (Shaw 1979, p. 265). The period was characterised by 'pacification by force', in which the settlers valued the lives of cattle above those of the indigenous occupants of the land (Birkup 1973).

The same situation existed in east Arnhemland. Based on his fieldwork in the Port Keats (Wadeye) area in the nineteen thirties, Stanner (1960, p.78) wrote of the anarchy and breakdown of traditional Aboriginal society:

*Many of the preconditions of traditional culture were gone- a sufficient population, a self-sustaining economy, a discipline by elders, a confident dependency on nature and, with the preconditions, went much of the culture.*

Once the issue of land ownership was resolved in favour of the pastoralists, the issue of labour shortage was addressed. Aborigines provided a source of cheap labour and quickly learned the necessary skills to control stock. In order to induce Aborigines to become stockmen and housekeepers and stop them from spearing station beef for food, pastoralists offered rations of food, tobacco, and opium (Rowse 1987).

From the Aboriginal perspective, there were positive consequences of involvement with the pastoral industry. The stations represented isolated self sufficient communities and mobility across the land, not alien to those of traditional Aboriginal society. Even family relationships could be maintained through the employment of women in the kitchens. Issues of 'ancestral land', however, were unresolved, while inter-clan mixing on stations introduced new problems.

In addition to the skills associated with droving, the Aborigines were introduced to consumer goods, such as mustering and horse riding paraphernalia, work clothing and boots, tobacco, alcohol, flour, sugar and tea. During the 'wet' season, when work-loads were reduced, the Aborigines were sent on 'holiday' to reduce pastoralists' operating costs. This time was spent in traditional lifestyle, providing an opportunity to maintain viable hunting skills, visit kin, gather for important ceremonial events, settle inter-group disputes and undertake the initiation of young men. Ironically, an Aboriginal world-view and traditional values were

partly maintained in a relatively secure and stable environment.

Aborigines were provided with European names by the station and sufficient reading and writing skills in English to satisfy employer needs. Many even began to regard the station as 'home'. Aboriginal compliance was extended through the introduction of a government legislated indenture system that established minimum standards of food, clothing and health to be provided by the pastoralist in return for an obligation to remain and work. While there were no reported fines for breach of contract by employers, there were numerous instances of whippings and imprisonment for Aborigines who absconded. These practices helped to destroy established Aboriginal social structures.

Young Aboriginal ringers, with newly acquired droving skills and material possessions, considered themselves more privileged and important than older men and began to challenge traditional food taboos and tribal custom (Reynolds 1982). As women became intermediaries between homestead and camp, their relationships with Aboriginal men were affected. This was further exacerbated by their use for purposes of sexual satisfaction by European males. As McGrath (1987, p. 3) noted:

*Although white men arrived womanless, their guns and goods meant they gained access to Aboriginal females. The story starts with Aborigines in control of a world upon which Europeans had started to encroach. It concludes in a loss of power, and emphasises male Aboriginal loss of their women (McGrath 1987, p. 3).*

Mulvaney (1989) added that while European males dominated sexual relationships with Aboriginal women through the supply of highly desired European goods, the prevailing attitudes were such that Aboriginal women were blamed as the purveyors of sexually transmitted diseases.



Government stations were also set up in an attempt to relocate indigenous people who were either unemployable or surplus to pastoralists' needs. The intent was to breed and raise cattle to feed the inhabitants, thus reducing their need to roam across pastoral land or attack private property. The largest Government station in the Kimberley, Moola Boola, was established in 1910. Rations of food and clothing, as well as force, were used to bring Aborigines to settle on the station. Clans from diverse backgrounds, and often with no previous contact with Europeans, were trucked from across the Kimberley and permanently settled in close quarters, with little concern for kinship taboos (Crawford 1989). Moola Bulla station was sold by the government to private interests in 1955 and, even the Gidja tribe, the original inhabitants of this land, who had been able to retain access to their land, were now denied this.

The further reduction in male labour during the Second World War emphasised the importance of the Aboriginal workers to the Kimberley and their mobility was restricted even further. Even cash payment for labour was withheld until the 1950s, under the paternalistic rationale that it would increase Aboriginal social problems (Hunter 1993). Isolation and the lack of Aboriginal power to demand better pay and conditions helped maintain the status quo until the 1960s when pressure for equal wages for Aboriginal workers began to mount. The 1969 Pastoral Award, guaranteeing the basic wage and minimum standards to Aboriginal station workers, only served to worsen their situation. Pastoralists replaced their labour with new technologies, such as helicopters, displacing families who had lived on the stations all their lives into nearby towns. These soon swelled with camps of fringe dwellers living on their outskirts and later on community reserves (Sandall 1973). In Fitzroy Crossing during the 1970s, the situation deteriorated to the stage where:

*Approximately 350 Aboriginals of several different language groups and station backgrounds were camped together on Middle Reserve, sharing one tap and virtually no other facility apart from proximity to a welfare office and a store ...Social problems such as child neglect, drunkenness, breaking of traditional laws and taboos, disease and filth, increased markedly (Yengoyen 1979, p. 13)*

It is interesting to note that, while economic viability was cited as the reason for dismissing Aboriginal workers, the reduction of sixty percent in Aboriginal worker numbers equated almost numerically with the thirty percent increase in non-Aboriginal employment (Sandell 1973, p.1). For many, this was the final step in removal from what they still considered to be their land, with no redress whatsoever to the 'new' law of the land.

### 3.4.3 THE MINERS

With the discovery of gold in Halls Creek in the 1880s, men trekked overland or arrived by sea at the ports of Wyndham or Derby. In many instances the miners leapfrogged pastoral expansion, reaching remote clans and fossicking on their land before the Aborigines had come into contact with settlers. Unlike the pastoralists, the miners were transients and had less need for Aboriginal labour and no need to form any relationships with the indigenous occupants. Additionally, their behaviour was less rational to the Aborigines, as they brought no stock, only digging and abandoning holes for no apparent reason (Reynolds 1982).

The frontier mining towns provided ample opportunity for the introduction and diffusion of consumer goods among Aborigines. Once again Aboriginal women were either taken forcibly or sold into prostitution in return for these consumer goods, particularly flour, sugar, tea and tobacco. Local clans developed tactics to resist the miners' encroachment on their land, attacking isolated camps, spearing

horses and raiding unattended tents for consumer goods (Reynolds 1982).

Since the early alluvial gold rushes, the mining of gold, iron, uranium, diamonds, and other mineral resources has served less to provide consumer goods or incomes to Aborigines than to displace them from their traditional lands (Hawke and Gallagher 1989; Reynolds 1989). In doing so, such mining transformed traditional lands with sacred Dreaming sites and ceremonial grounds into a European economic commodity and this remains the harshest area of conflict between European and Aboriginal world views.

The doctrine of *Terra Nullius* enabled Europeans, under British law, to treat Australia as uncultivated or unoccupied. This doctrine was enunciated in a verdict given in 1849 by Chief Justice Stephen of the New South Wales Supreme Court, who stated:

*The circumstances of newly discovered and unpeopled territories, claimed by and vested in the Crown, on behalf of all its subjects, are so widely different from those of a populated and long-settled country, in which the lands never practically belonged to the Crown ... have for centuries been owned or cultivated by its subjects, that a moment's reflection would present them to the mind even of a stranger. The lands in new territories are unoccupied and waste, until granted by the crown to some individual, willing to reclaim them from a state of nature (Cited in Reynolds 1989, 67-68).*

While the 1992 Mabo court decision overturned the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* and recognised Aboriginal rights to lands for the first time since contact, it offers no hope of regaining lands that have been taken over by others (Rowse 1993).

## 3.4.4

## THE MISSIONS

The missionaries represented the most complex and enduring of all influences on Aboriginal culture (Hunter 1993). Much has been written denouncing the ethnocentric methods employed by the missionaries in their endeavours to 'civilise' and 'Christianise', or in effect 'Europeanise', the Aboriginal people. At the same time, the imparting of those skills which enabled Aboriginal pride and the Aboriginal voice to be heard has been lauded by others. Indeed, some Aboriginal groups in the Kimberley would not have survived without them. Whether for better or worse, the impact of the missions upon Aboriginal lifestyle has been significant.

From the beginning of state government in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Western Australian government viewed the missions as a tool to assist in the implementation of government policies. The missions were allocated large tracts of land in areas of the Kimberley unsuited to pastoral or pearling pursuits and these represented the first continuous contact between many Aborigines and Europeans. Their stated aim was the protection and civilising of the indigenous people and the teaching of the word of God (Willis 1988).

Aboriginal contact with the missions appears to have followed a common pattern of cautious surveillance, followed by male arrival and investigation. Finally women and children appeared after mutual confidence had been established (Reynolds 1982). The Aborigines soon recognised that the missions provided a sanctuary from the deprivations inflicted by pastoralists and pearlers, as well as attacks by other Aboriginal groups whose resources had been expropriated by Europeans. Aboriginal elder David Mowaljarlai (Mowaljarlai and Malnic 1993, p. 116) recounts these times:

*When the Overlanders came, they started the shooting of the old bushmen. And policemen came round shooting them. Only the refugees were left, the ones that came to the missions. In my grandfather's time the missions saved the lives of Aborigines. Those station people they were touchy for their cattle, about Aborigines spearing them down. And the managers were rough. They shot everybody, anybody... if the missions hadn't been there all Aborigines would have been shot clean-out of there.*

In addition, the missions were an important source of European commodities, such as tools, flour, sugar and especially tobacco, which were exchanged for work and attendance at often incomprehensible prayer meetings (Huffer 1983).

One of the first tasks the missions set themselves was getting the Aborigines to abandon their nomadic ways and settle at the missions. In order to accomplish this, a common tactic was to establish dependency on the mission by offering food, tobacco, transportation, clothing and various consumer durables (Alroe 1988). David Mowaljarlai (Mowaljarlai and Malnic 1993, p. 115) recounted his introduction to tobacco as a boy at the Kalumburu mission, after he had finished school:

*At Christmas time we got a present -- a pipe, a tin of tobacco and matches. The missionaries filled up the pipes with tobacco and placed them in our mouths. They lit all the pipes for us and we started puffing. It made us giddy and made us silly. Then the missionaries said, "Right. You are man enough to smoke, you can do a man's job now." So we were put into different jobs.*

The Aborigines found added advantages in attending missions in areas where they could maintain access to their land and hunting, while leaving women and children in the care of the mission. At the same time, the missions attempted to

impose Christian religious beliefs while striving to break down traditional Aboriginal customs and values. At one extreme was complete intolerance and prohibition of any activities related to traditional lifestyle. At the other were attempts to Christianise within existing acceptable lifestyle practices, although this approach was much later in coming (Hunter 1993). The common method for removing children from tribal influences was to place them in dormitories, socialising them into European cultural values. The missions believed this would enable easier manipulation of souls and minds and provide sanitisation from the corruption of Aboriginal culture (Alroe 1988).

Aboriginal acceptance of Christianity was often only superficial in order to obtain those goods that the missionaries often made contingent upon church attendance (Berndt and Berndt 1988). Nevertheless, these rewards were effective in getting large numbers of Aborigines to settle, and become increasingly dependent on, missions. Stanner (1979) claimed that discussions with Aborigines, who had gone to the missions as children, showed that the Aboriginal desire for tobacco and tea was so intense that none could bear to go without. Addiction to these stimulants had resulted, he argues, in cravings and uncommon displays of jealousy, ill will and even violence over the division of small quantities. Yet whole tribes continued to move to where these avidly desired things could be obtained. The effects of this one-sided paternalistic generosity were to also generate feelings of dependency and inferiority together with a structured inequality of superficial obedience and gratitude (Willis 1988).

For most Aboriginal people, the mission was a painful, disturbing and disorientating experience. In most cases, being Christian assumed living by 'white' standards and rejecting traditional ways. In addition to their labour, the missions wanted body and soul (Berndt and Berndt 1988). Ultimately the missions' agenda required that Aborigines not only renounce their religion, but also their identity,

their kinship, their law, and their language (Hunter 1993). A generation of children, taken by the missions to live in sex-segregated dormitories, was the most heavily indoctrinated, being taught in church-run schools to speak only English, wear European clothing, and adopt European names and work habits. The expectation was that they would renounce their traditional identity.

Not only did churches introduce new goods into Aboriginal consumption, they were also insistent on destroying elements of traditional material culture, including sacred objects, as well as the rituals in which they were used (Kolig 1981). More recent mission policies have sought to syncretically incorporate and co-opt traditional Aboriginal music, song, dance, body painting, and church liturgies. At Wadeye, the Catholic mission is even beginning to participate in ceremonies at sacred places and in initiation rituals. Funeral ceremonies also involve a mixture of native religion and Catholicism.

One of the more enduring legacies of the missions is the education they provided, ultimately one of the most critical factors in social change. Ironically, the suppression of indigenous languages and education in English enabled the political voice, that was partly responsible for the decline of the missions, to arise (Hunter 1993). In addition to destroying the traditional cultures that had ensured Aboriginal survival for so long, the missions have also been criticised for isolating Aborigines and preparing them for existence in a social enclave of little importance to mainstream 'white' society (Kolig 1988). This is perhaps true of isolated communities such as Kalumburu, which comprised full-blood, tradition-oriented Aborigines. Others, such as Lombadina, which contained a large mixed-descent group brought in from surrounding regions, provided an education that appears to have adequately equipped many for successful entry into the wider community (Hunter 1993).

While the 1950s represented the highpoint of the missions in the Kimberley, the Catholic church reassessed the role of their missions during the 1960s and began to relinquish control to local communities (Hunter 1993). It can be questioned, however, whether the role of the church in these communities has been superseded by that of 'white' administrators. While the mission is long gone from the first research site (Lombadina), its previous presence is still strongly evident. In both Kalumburu and Wadeye the mission is still present. Kalumburu mission has officially lost control but, in reality, remains a strong political force. In Wadeye the mission is operative in education and, while having no role in administration and self-determination, it continues to wield a powerful influence in daily life.

### 3.4.5 THE GOVERNMENT

*You are to endeavour by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them. And if any of our subjects shall wantonly destroy them, or give them unnecessary interruption in their exercise of their several occupations, it is our will and pleasure that you do cause such offenders to be brought to punishment according to the degree of the offence. (Instructions given to Governor Philip, 23 April 1787. Historical Records of New South Wales, Sydney 1889, P. 485, Cited in Reynolds 1989, p. 183)*

It must be remembered that the British occupation of Australia predated the theories of cultural evolution. In fact it occurred at a time when European notions of the Aboriginal as a noble savage were prevalent. Unable to cope with the reality of the colonial situation, the imperial policy of 'amity and trust', outlined above, failed dismally. Local administrators adopted laissez faire policies that gave settlers a free hand in dealing with "the native problem" (Reynolds 1989).



The 1830s witnessed the climax of the European humanitarian movement and the abolition of slavery. The humanitarians' concern for the indigenous peoples of the British Empire resulted in the establishment of Protectors of Aborigines, with wide ranging powers. Together with missions, which were encouraged through government financial support, their chief function was to civilise the indigenous people. The following excerpt from the 'Instructions to the Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia (1840)' illustrates the tenor of their powers.

*You will be careful to impress upon the natives the determination of the Government to treat them with the most strict and impartial justice; that whilst no one will be allowed to maltreat them under any pretence whatever, neither will they be allowed to transgress our laws and customs; that no offence committed by them will be passed over; that forgiveness will never be extended to any of them who may be guilty of murder or aggravated robbery; and that, however long a person may succeed in evading the hands of justice, he will, when taken, be made to bear the full penalty of his crime (Cited in Reynolds 1989, p.186)*

In practice, only one side of these instructions was upheld and the Protectors of Aborigines became more concerned with the protection of the settlers. Pastoralists and other economic opportunists, who were economically dependent on Aboriginal labour, used their political power to ensure this situation prevailed. In 1848 the title was changed to 'Guardians of the Aborigines and Protectors of Settlers' (Yengoyen 1979). This period coincided with the development of evolutionist theories of progression from savagery to civilisation and Darwinian notions of the survival of the fittest. The Australian Aborigine was considered 'doomed to extinction' and survival rates following settlement appeared to support this premise (Howard 1982).

When it became obvious that extinction was not inevitable, policy was refocussed to stress control of the Aborigines. There were three major political influences impacting upon the conduct of this policy. The pastoralists desired to retain a cheap Aboriginal labour supply while trade unions wished to protect 'white' men's jobs, and local governments wanted to maintain congenial race relations (Yengoyen 1979).

The government and missions provided meagre rations and curfews for Aborigines were imposed in country towns. Stockton (1988) wrote that the State-established Aboriginal Protection Board,

*...interfered in the lives of Aborigines in the minutest detail: holding people on reserves under white management, restricting their movement, repeatedly relocating communities, and removing children from their families on the least pretext (p. 205).*

By the beginning of the twentieth century most Aborigines lived on reserves and were dependent on Europeans for scarce employment. They were forbidden to consume alcohol, carry a firearm, have more than a small sum of money in their name, travel interstate or across the 26th parallel, or marry, cohabit with, or have sexual relationships with non-Aborigines (Sharp 1992).

The exploitation and maltreatment of Aborigines in these remote areas finally resulted in the Western Australian government's appointment of W.E. Roth to conduct the first Royal Commission into Aboriginal Affairs during 1905. Roth's report was damning and reported adversely on drunkenness and prostitution arising from the pearling industry, the unlawful police practice of arresting and chaining Aboriginal witnesses to ensure their attendance at court, and the misuse of the indenture system for the benefit of pearlers and pastoralists (Seaman 1984). The political power of the pastoralists was demonstrated with all recommendations of the Roth Report being rejected. Indeed State powers were widened. The Aboriginal

Act of 1905 included the right to remove unemployed Aborigines to reserves and 'illegitimate' half caste children from their mothers, a practice the ramifications of which are only now being addressed. It was made an offence to cohabit or supply liquor to Aborigines (Hasluck 1988).

A second Royal Commission was established in 1934 in response to continued allegations of brutality and slavery in the pastoral industry. The outcome was the Native Administration Act of 1934, which enabled the removal of Aboriginal people from European communities and the delegation of control in remote areas to pastoralists and missions. During the Depression of the 1930s, rations stopped and many Aborigines found themselves on the brink of starvation (Biskup 1973).

With the renewed notions of social equality that followed the Second World War, together with the experience of wartime labour shortages, which had resulted in greater involvement of Aborigines in economic production, the Western Australian government adopted a policy of assimilation. The Government moved slowly toward giving Aborigines equal rights to non-Aboriginal Australians (Forrest and Sherwood 1988). However, while legislation alluded to equality of rights and privileges, it was assumed that this would occur within a European framework. It was taken for granted that Aboriginal culture and tradition was inconsequential and of no value. Despite this change of direction in policy, Aborigines were denied Social Service payments until 1960 (Yengoyen 1979).

The Federal Government gained legislative control over Aboriginal Issues through a referendum in 1967, reducing the longstanding power of pastoral groups in Western Australia. Aborigines were finally recognised as citizens and given the rights to vote, carry firearms, and consume alcohol. Federal government policy encouraged the preservation of remaining Aboriginal culture and focused on 'Self Determination', with the ultimate goal being Aboriginal economic self-sufficiency and control of their own destiny. This policy ushered in a new breed of

government worker, administrators for the supposedly autonomous Aboriginal communities. As Long (1979, p. 363) pointed out:

*The distribution of government funds by an enthusiastic Australian government, motivated by a sincere wish to give financial impetus to the much publicised policy of 'self determination', was often thrust upon groups which were unable to cope administratively with the sudden transition from poverty to comparative riches.*

There is still far to go before the government's goal of self-determination is achieved. Over half of Australia's Aborigines remain unemployed, which is more than six times the national average (McDonald 1987). In the remote outback areas where our data were collected, unemployment levels are significantly higher. There, the majority of Aborigines survive on various types of government welfare. Average incomes are less than half those of non-Aboriginal Australians and ninety percent live below the poverty line (Evans 1989). The Aboriginal communities of the Kimberley region depend almost totally on welfare (Yu 1994). A large proportion of this welfare is returned to the Government through the medium of taxes, especially on alcohol sales. Nearly half of the Aborigines in the Kimberley live in improvised housing, often without sewage, with most of the remainder occupying government supplied houses. Life expectancy at birth is 20 years less than the national average and only seventeen percent of Aborigines finish high school (McDonald 1987). In an effort not to seem paternalistic, government welfare programs for Aborigines lack controls on how money is spent. This includes Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), which are commonly labelled "working for the dole" (Rowse 1993). In these projects the community decides what work residents must do to qualify for their payments. Because there is little work to be done and increased hardship will be created if payments are not made, the work is often low level with little distinction between workers and non-

workers (Rowse 1993).

Despite the decimation of much of the infrastructure of traditional pre-contact Aboriginal culture, it has never been entirely erased. Berndt and Berndt (1992) argued that, while Aboriginal culture had a long history it was also a living and significant part of the present. Its replacement, they concluded, was by no means inevitable.

With the dramatic changes that have occurred, largely within the current century, the Aborigines of the Kimberley find themselves with hybrid cultures. It could be argued that they have one foot in their traditional cultural world and the other in the high technology world of global consumer culture. Alternatively, it could be argued that they have been forced into involuntary independence, with both feet in the air. At the end of a career of Aboriginal ethnography focused on the Wadeye community, Stanner (1979, p. 368) wrote about Aboriginal behaviours within a compulsory society, saying:

*I know of no Aborigines who appear to want to live in a style of life in which there will be no element of Europeanism... I know many individual persons- and not only the elderly- who passionately want to keep to old ways and old things, but I do not recall one who wanted to shut out all European ways and things. ... Everywhere I have been in recent years there has been an expressed want for at least pieces of our instrumental culture -- goods, money, transport -- to be used in a combination of their own choice within their own life purposes. We know that this response has in a broad sense been continuous and universal since the earliest days of contact. But widely the expressed wants are now more elaborate and far-reaching.*

### 3.4.6 LAND RIGHTS

Of all the factors impacting on Aboriginal society since European settlement, the most profound has been the dislocation and loss of control over land (Reynolds, 1989). Dispossession and relocation to reserves or as fringe dwellers in rural communities has resulted not only in loss of access to traditional land and the resources it contains, but also in the weakening of Aboriginal social organisation through both the splitting of kinship bonds and the obligations and reciprocity associated with traditional social life.

The issue of Aboriginal land rights has been an emotional and drawn out issue from the time of British occupation. The European tendency was to view land as an expendable object that could be exchanged and exploited. The Aboriginal viewpoint was that it was a source of life, spirit and sustenance that could no more be exchanged than one's kin (Blowes 1992).

In the Kimberley today, the traditional system of Aboriginal land tenure still exists, although somewhat tenuously, alongside the system introduced by the British colonisers. While Aborigines have reluctantly acknowledged the rights established under Australian law, they do not necessarily recognise that these supersede their own. Aboriginal law in the Kimberley still recognises land control rights through inheritance from kin, extended periods of residency, detailed knowledge of the landscape, place of conception or birth and the place of death of a lineal kinsperson. Under Aboriginal law, their entitlement to land overrides any status it may have under non-Aboriginal law (Coombs 1978).

The contemporary Aboriginal concept of land rights in the Kimberley is concerned with control, as much as it is with ownership, and also carries with it an obligation to care for the land and its resources. It includes the right to live from it and be part of the social organisation that it supports. Not only does access to land

provide a means of imparting knowledge, skills and pride to the young, it also allows the choice of lifestyle, separation from the judgement of others and escape from the abuses associated with gambling and alcohol. Most importantly, land is the major source of Aboriginal identity. The restoration of land rights underwrites all strategies for future Aboriginal development and existence (Coombs 1989).

This does not mean, however, that the Aboriginal concept of land has not changed since European settlement. Coombs (1978) noted that Aborigines had become environmentally destructive following their adoption of European foodstuffs, motor vehicles and other gadgetry. During the 1980s, he investigated means of reducing Aboriginal land degradation in the Kimberley, although acknowledging that many feral animals now filled the dietary needs previously met by threatened or extinct native species (Coombs 1989). Kolig (1987) concurred, adding that cattle raising had all but completely dislodged any memories of hunting and gathering. He went on to suggest that Aborigines treat pastoralism as seriously as 'The Dreamtime'.

### 3.5 ABORIGINAL CULTURAL RESURGENCE

Since the very beginning of European settlement much has been written about the destruction of Aboriginal culture and lifestyle, including the complete demise of Aboriginal society itself. Stanner (1965), on returning to the Wadeye community in 1952 after an absence of seventeen years, noted:

*the blacks were on wages and very money-conscious; all had European clothes and in their camps, some now reasonably well built, one could find gramophones, torches, kitchenware, even bicycles; some of the younger people, though unable to read, were fond of looking at comic papers and illustrated magazines; the old men had lost authority; and, although I did not have time to make proper inquiry, I had the impression*

*that the traditional culture was on its last legs (Stanner 1965, p. 90).*

These dire warnings have not come to pass. Aboriginal religion and neo-traditional cultures are resurfacing. It seems that Aborigines who lived beyond the direct influence of the missions never really embraced Christianity (Tonkinson 1974). Even within the missions themselves, where Aboriginal religion was driven underground, there was never any real incentive for Aborigines to reject indigenous cultural traditions in favour of Christianity. These traditions have resurfaced, albeit undergoing predictable metamorphosis. (Kolig 1988) suggests that this failure to convert Aborigines must have been galling to missionaries, who could not accept that traditional Aboriginal religion did not even qualify as a true religion. He noted that the missionaries stern dictum of "no work-no food" was reversed to: "no tobacco-no halleluja" (Kolig 1988, p. 386). Sharp (1952) foreshadowed the demise of an entire Aboriginal tribe, the Yir Yoront, due to their inability to incorporate technological goods into their Dreaming stories, hence undermining the cosmological supports of their entire cultural system. In a follow up study, Taylor (1988) found that cultural traditions were alive and well and that Dreaming myths continued, along with their associated rituals. It has been further argued that Aboriginal cosmology does in fact facilitate change, maintaining social cohesion and preventing disintegration in the face of change (Bos 1988). That these Dreaming stories are now being published in the English language is testimony to a resurgence of Aboriginal pride, as well as religious resilience.

Aboriginal law is also making a revival in the Kimberley, although there are suggestions that it never disappeared, instead operating clandestinely outside the reach of missionary influence (Willis 1988). Aboriginal art, song and dance have also been invigorated, particularly for non-indigenous consumption in urban areas and for ever-increasing streams of tourists. Aboriginal language revival has been supported by programs within schools, as well as Aboriginal corporation controlled



radio and television broadcasting. There is also a continued movement from fringe dwellings in Kimberley towns to rural out stations (Coombs 1978).

As the consumption of culture has become more prevalent in contemporary tourism, the 'tourist gaze' has become an intrinsic part of these experiences. Urry (1990) describes the tourist gaze as an activity constructed through cultural difference and presupposing a system of social activities and symbols that contrast with the tourists' everyday activities. Tourism services are required in proximity to these and this, in itself, has ramifications for those involved in cultural tourism. While the tourist gaze was tolerated at Lombadina, it was temporarily managed through restricted times of access so that the impact on the community was minimised. At One Arm Point, a spatial separation of tourist and community land was implemented so that the gaze was restricted to what the community wanted the tourists to see. The Kalumburu and Wadeye communities were protected from tourism to some extent by remoteness, but also insisted on council approval for non-Aboriginal entry into the community.

Alongside this resurgence of neo-traditional culture and pride, discrimination and poverty persist. Alcohol continues to wreak havoc among communities and suicides continue at well above the rate of non-indigenous Australians. Gambling adds to the levels of neglect and abuse within the family and exacerbates already severe health problems. While Aborigines comprise less than half of the population of the Kimberleys they comprise more than ninety percent of prison inmates (Hunter 1993).

It is almost certain that traditional Aboriginal cultures were not static prior to European contact but were sufficiently strong to survive perhaps millennia without major upheaval. Even today, while pressures from the wider Australian society continue, so does the ability of Aboriginal culture to adapt to change. Yengoyan (1979, p. 412) noted:

*It is a tribute that the Aboriginal in Australia has maintained the richness of language, cultural content, and formal structures through decades of change. The internal complexity of structure and content, the elaboration of oppositions and inversions, and the perseverance of the society in times of change and cultural decay must be understood as testimonials to the existence of a highly creative cultural form.*

In each of the sites investigated in this study, Aboriginal culture impacts significantly upon contemporary consumption behaviours. It is this cultural influence and the inherent patterns of adaption, adoption and resistance to global consumer culture that is the focus of this current study.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> According to northern Kimberley convention, sacred objects moved in a clockwise direction while the exchanged cloth, shells and foodstuffs moved counter clockwise.
- <sup>2</sup> Patrilineal refers to kinship being determined through the male line while exogamous refers to the male finding a marriage partner from outside his immediate community or clan. Patrilocal refers to residence occurring in the male family's community.
- <sup>3</sup> The term *Dreamtime* is more commonly used. However, Swain (1993) argues that the conception of Aboriginal cosmology as involving time rather than space is a Western misunderstanding and suggests that *Dreamplace* is more accurate. To encompass both possibilities, Stanner's (1979) term *The Dreaming* is used in this study.

- 4 *Buru* is the Bardi equivalent to Stanner's "estate" concept and in combination comprise the Bardi 'range' which covered the northern most tip of the Dampier peninsular. Robinson (1973) notes that only 21 of these Burus retain genealogical links with current residents or those of the recent past.
- 5 The Bardi term for these spirit children or spirit familiars is *raiya*. They are described as tiny child like beings (Elkin 1932) embodied within each buru. They accompany men on their journeys, warn them of danger and appear in their Dreams.
- 6 The date of 60,000 years was challenged following the discovery of charcoal and pollen samples in drill cores that indicated human settlement may have begun in Australia at least 120,000 years ago (Singh, Kershaw and Clark, 1981). This theory has since been disputed and the figure of 40,000 to 60,000 years of occupation is still considered the most accurate.
- 7 Butlin (1995) suggests that the Aboriginal population prior to occupation may have been as high as one million.
- 8 Snooks suggests that the Australian Aborigine may have worked as little as five hours per day and maintained a healthy diet and a comfortable lifestyle. Butlin (1995) made a rough estimate that, just prior to British occupation, the Aboriginal GDP per capita may have been about half of that in England.
- 9 It has been suggested that the comment "miserablest people in the world" may not in fact have been made by Dampier but added later as a journalistic summation.
- 10 Regulations were imposed under the British legislated "Pearl Shell Regulation Act (1873), forbidding 'blackbirding' (the kidnapping of Aborigines). No convictions occurred and the practice continued with the collusion of the pearlers, pastoralists and government officials until the 'indenture system' was introduced during the 1980s (Hunter 1993, p. 51).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

It has been argued that individuals are products of their sociocultural environment and, consequently, consumption behaviours are primarily sociocultural phenomena (McCracken 1988, Sahlin 1976). As such, methods for studying individual or group consumption behaviours must involve an examination of cultural practices, value systems and behavioural norms as they relate to consumption (Venkatesh 1995). To date, a wide diversity of quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been used in consumer behaviour and cultural research (eg. Belk 1997, Geertz 1973, Hofstede 1984). The choice of research methodology can be explained by either researcher preference or the nature of the research itself (Firat 1992, Holbrook 1988).

#### 4.1 METHODOLOGY

Venkatesh (1999) claims that standard social science research methods, especially within cross-cultural research, limit the researcher's ability to study both the meanings attached to consumer goods and their signifiatory processes. The appropriateness of these methods was first questioned by a number of consumer researchers during the 1980s (Belk 1990). This questioning resulted in a small group embarking on a team project (The Consumer Behaviour Odyssey), which used a variety of naturalistic methods to explore American consumption. The

success of this project led to the increased adoption and development of interpretive methods within consumer research. These include phenomenology, hermeneutics, semiotics and ethnography (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989, Hirschman 1992, Mick 1986, Miller 1997).

Perhaps the most innovative of these was that undertaken by Arnould (1989), who dealt for the first time in consumer research with cultures other than the researcher's own. Arnould, a trained anthropologist, created ethnographic texts that challenged existing consumer research methods and provided alternative ways of understanding the concepts of consumption within another culture.

An ethnography is a written account arising from observation and in-depth interviews, rather than a description of the fieldwork (Marcus and Fischer 1986), although it does involve a systematic description of the culture in which it occurs, as well as the interpretation of different ways of life (Joy 1990). Ethnographic methodology differs from surveys or experiments, which assume prior understanding of the phenomena being studied. Instead, researchers develop an understanding of the phenomena being investigated as it occurs 'in situ'. This understanding is then tested 'in situ' (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989). In ethnographic research, observation is considered to be as important as depth interviews.

Ethnographic methodology involves a long term study of consumption practices as they occur in their contextual setting, is conducted in the presence of those being studied, revolves around the interpretation of what people actually do, rather than what they say they do, and is conducted within a framework of daily activities and cosmological beliefs (Miller 1997). It also provides access to the symbolic meanings embedded in products and provides data that explicates local phenomena, while providing insights into broader theoretical frameworks (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Given the limitations imposed through language constraints, ethnographic methodology was considered the most viable for studying fourth

world consumption behaviours. There are also a number of techniques that may be used to enhance the trustworthiness of this methodology and these are outlined in section 4.3 below.

## 4.2 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was conducted over a period of thirty months between December 1992 and July 1995. The initial data were collected as part of a large group project, while the five subsequent visits comprised smaller teams of researchers. The duration and activities associated with each of these visits is set out below and also summarised in Appendix One. The data collection comprised observations of daily consumption activities, which were recorded into field notes, as well as unstructured interviews with Aborigines and non-Aboriginal store managers, health workers, school teachers, general workers, police officers and mission personnel.

Autodriving techniques (Heisley and Levy 1991), involving interviews being driven by informants when they hear or see their own recorded behaviour, were also used. These involved rough hand drawn sketch maps, depicting the homes of informants and special features, such as sacred sites, as well as artefacts made by informants. Using these, further questions were asked to ensure accuracy of meaning. This was a successful way of gaining deeper insights as the majority of informants appeared to enjoy both the crude attempts to depict landscape features and the obvious errors that were made in their construction. Video recordings were later used for the same purpose and these enabled a negotiated interpretation of meanings. The use of videos is outlined in more depth in section 4.3 below.

Interviews were recorded on audio tape and later transcribed. In addition, a three person camera crew accompanied the group project (Stage Two) and the final site visit (Stage Seven). As well as filming daily consumption activities, this camera crew filmed forty one interviews during stage two and a further sixteen during stage seven. These were also transcribed. The transcribed audio and video interviews,

along with field notes regarding observations, were proofed by the author for entry into a computerised data base. Although data from a number of sites were available, only data from the three sites relevant to this current study and data collected while the author was present were used in this study. This data base comprised more than two thousand single spaced pages.

#### **4.2.1 STAGE ONE: PRELIMINARY KIMBERLEY VISIT**

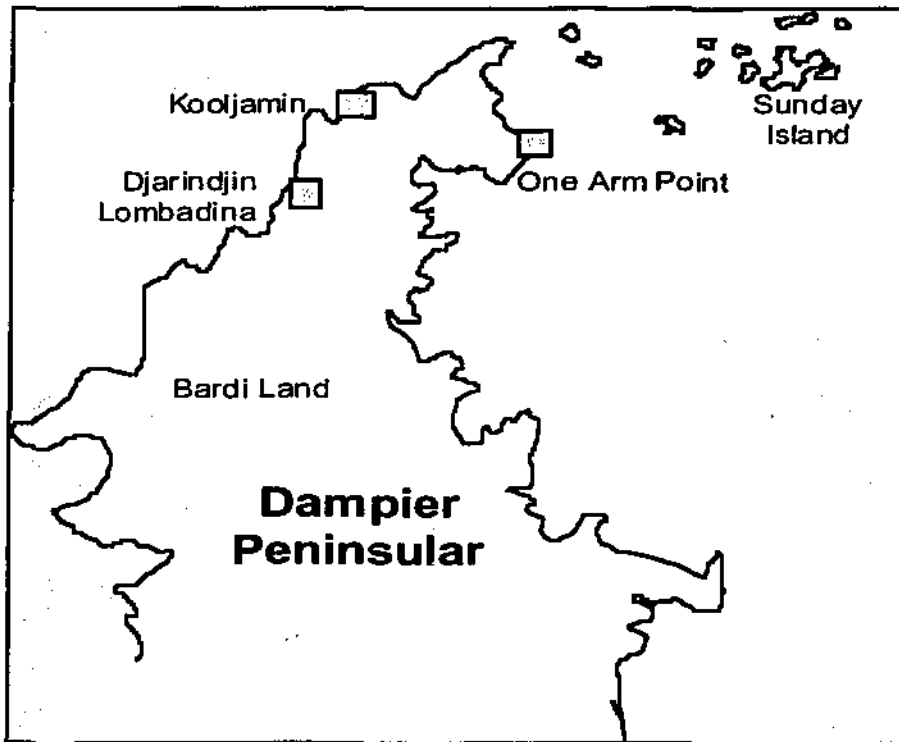
Six months prior to commencing data collection, the author accompanied two brothers of Aboriginal descent, and their father, into a number of Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region. The brothers were enrolled as post graduate students under the author's direction and were familiar with the communities visited as they had been raised in the Kimberley. One brother regularly visited the communities in his employment with the Aboriginal Economic Development Office. Their father was Minister for the North-West and formerly Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Western Australian Government at the time and is a well known and highly respected Aboriginal person in the communities visited. Permission was gained from community elders to return with a larger research group and to use audio and video equipment for the collection of data. Following this preliminary visit, the author studied ethnographic work conducted in these communities by previous researchers.

#### **4.2.2 STAGE TWO: KIMBERLEY GROUP PROJECT**

The group research project involved a seventeen person, multi-cultural team including two professors from the United States and one from Denmark. Each had published ethnographic consumer research. The team also included two Australian academics, undergraduate and postgraduate students and a three person professional camera crew (Refer to Appendix One). The group was organised into three separate research teams. The brothers of Aboriginal descent acted as observers

and liaison persons between the group and Aboriginal communities. The author organised and coordinated the project. The objective of the project was to conduct exploratory research into Aboriginal consumption behaviour using qualitative field work methods under the direction of experienced qualitative researchers.

Following a four thousand kilometre drive from Perth in four wheel drive vehicles, each of the three teams spent the first week in one of three Aboriginal



MAP ONE: THE DAMPIER PENINSULA COMMUNITIES

communities (Lombadina, Djarindjin, One Arm Point), all of which are situated in close proximity on the Dampier Peninsula (Refer to Map One). Residents in all three of these coastal communities interact frequently, and comprise people from the Bardj language group that has a long tradition of involvement with the sea.

The research involved both participant and non-participant observation of daily activities at one of the sites, although the author also visited the other sites to observe and discuss differences. Once each team's presence had been explained and permission to interview granted, both audio and video interviews were conducted. These were supplemented with photographs that were later used for analysis. Each



team conducted daily research meetings and periodic group meetings were held to discuss emerging insights, plan further data collection, address problems and receive feedback from the two Aboriginal observers.

During the second week, the three teams were relocated to three diverse inland sites some few hundred kilometres apart (Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, and Kununurra). These towns were chosen because of the differences they provide in economic purpose, historical development and social structure. The author and three other researchers stayed at Kununurra, the largest of these three inland communities, with a population of 3,500 people, of whom about half are of Aboriginal descent. Established in 1963 as an agricultural research station, Kununurra had absorbed Aborigines displaced from Kimberley cattle stations during the 1970s. Most are from the Mirrawong language group and live in the Mirima Aboriginal reserve on the outskirts of the town. The town houses government departments and services tourism and agricultural ventures irrigated from the Ord River scheme. The local Waringarri Aboriginal Corporation own and manage several commercial ventures, including a farm, radio station and art enterprise, which coordinates the production, sale and distribution of art work by local Aboriginal artists, including those at the Kalumburu and Wadeye communities. While data from these sites were not used in this study, they did assist in the overall interpretation and contacts made with Waringarri Aboriginal Corporation were used to gain entry into the communities of Kalumburu and Wadeye.

#### 4.2.3 STAGE THREE: WADEYE AND LOMBADINA

Six months after the initial data collection, the author and one other researcher returned to Lombadina to seek community approval to telecast video material as part of a nationally broadcast educational programme. This visit provided the

opportunity to discuss interpretive meanings with informants and to collect supplementary material.

While the Lombadina community had been strongly influenced by their mission, its direct presence had ceased in 1955. To understand the impact of the missions on Aboriginal consumption it was decided to visit two additional sites that had experienced mission presence. As part of the third stage of the research programme, Wadeye (Port Keats) was chosen because it had also been influenced by a mission and, like Lombadina, is a coastal community having traditional links with the sea. In addition, the size of Wadeye contrasts with that of Lombadina, being one of the largest remote Aboriginal communities in Australia. At Wadeye, the mission continues to maintain an active social, economic and political presence and has a strong influence on community activities.

While a number of Aborigine and non-Aborigine informants were interviewed at Wadeye, the interviews are incorporated into field notes along with observations and interpretive notes. These are supplemented with still photographs and video footage.

#### 4.2.4 STAGE FOUR: KALUMBURU

To complete the triangulation across sites, Kalumburu was selected as a third small coastal community. Like the other two communities, the residents of Kalumburu also maintain strong links with the sea. The level of mission control, however, was intermediate to the other two communities. The mission is controlled from Broome and has wielded a significant influence over the daily activities of the Aboriginal residents. As in the other two communities, political control has been passed on to the local council and the mission is in the process of phasing out their operations. Despite this, however, the mission continues to exert a strong influence on daily activities. For this fourth stage, the author co-ordinated a group of four researchers who visited Kalumburu for a week during April 1994. Observations,

interpretations and interviews are written into the field notes. Again, still photographs were used and became the basis for group discussion after the team vacated the site.

#### **4.2.5 STAGE FIVE: WADEYE**

The author returned to Wadeye six months later with one other researcher, spending one week at this site following a visit to nearby Bathurst Island. Once again, the Bathurst Island data assisted with interpretation but was not included in the data base for this study. Contacts made during the previous visit to Wadeye enabled eight comprehensive interviews to be conducted. These were transcribed and typed up separately from the observations and interpretations that were included in the field notes. Still photographs and a video camera were also used during this visit. In addition, arts experts with links to the site were interviewed on audio and video equipment prior to the visit and these were also transcribed and added to the data base.

#### **4.2.6 STAGE SIX: KALUMBURU**

The author returned to Kalumburu, eight months after the initial visit, accompanied by one of the previous researchers. This visit was for four days only but once again provided the opportunity to discuss interpretations with informants and to fill in gaps in the data that had arisen during the on-going analysis. Observations, discussions with informants and interpretive findings were transcribed into field notes.

#### **4.2.7 STAGE SEVEN: YIRKALLA**

The final stage of data collection involved the author, one other researcher and a three person camera crew spending a week at the Arnhem land community of Yirkalla. The major purpose of this visit was to collect material for a video

production on Aboriginal art, and no data from the visit was used in the data base for this study. However, observations were useful in drawing conclusions on consumption patterns and values attributable to cultural differences between each community.

While the duration of visits to each of the three sites was not long, the use of research teams, pre-contact visits, the facilitation of the former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the North-West, the presence of two Aboriginal students familiar with the communities, and the choice of diverse sites all helped to provide a rich data base. More than sixty hours of audio recordings and almost fifty hours of video recording were transcribed into the two thousand single spaced pages of data. Section 4.5 describes in greater detail, the three communities studied.

### 4.3 ENHANCING TRUSTWORTHINESS

All research methodologies require techniques for enhancing trustworthiness (Anderson 1986). Relevant procedures used during the data collection for this study included persistent observation, triangulation across sites and researchers, on-site team interaction, purposive sampling, reflexive journals, member checks and external audits.

Ethnographic research requires that sufficient observations are acquired to develop an understanding of the phenomena being examined and to assess the quality of the data collected. The fifty days of data collection over a thirty month period, involving multiple site visits and researchers, ensured a depth of understanding and a diversity of interpretation. This was further enhanced by triangulation across both sites and researchers and regular on-site team interaction to discuss methodological details relevant to emerging themes (Wallendorf and Belk 1988).

To ensure credible interpretation of data, purposive sampling was employed so that negative or contradictory examples were sought to challenge and modify these

themes (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Reflexive journals containing tentative interpretations of behaviours were also maintained. These enabled ongoing individual analysis and reflection on emerging interpretations and the planning of further data collection.

Member checks, in which interpretations are provided to informants for comment, were also used in this study. This took the form of video presentations utilising both informant interviews and behaviours with researcher voice overs of emergent themes. These were shown to informants during subsequent site visits and comments used to check the viability of the interpretation. While the themes went unchallenged, there were a few occasions where informants noted that they could not see the importance of what was being suggested. It was considered that this reflected a phenomenon noted elsewhere (Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf 1988), in which the informants do not have the same range of information on which to base a judgement.

External audits involve the comparison of interpretations with the data from which they were derived to judge the plausibility of interpretations and the adequacy of the data. It has been argued, however, that the sheer mass of data in a large project makes an internal audit by a person closer to the phenomena being interpreted a more credible source proposition than an outsider (Wallendorf and Belk 1988). This option was preferred and the Aboriginal brothers who accompanied the team were used to facilitate this.

#### 4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data commenced during the second stage of the study as initial patterns and themes began to emerge. The data collection and analysis went hand-in-hand through the remaining stages of the study. The constant comparison of observations and informant comments with emerging themes, both in the field

and on leaving each site, resulted in a continuous evolution of patterns and themes within an overall conceptual framework.

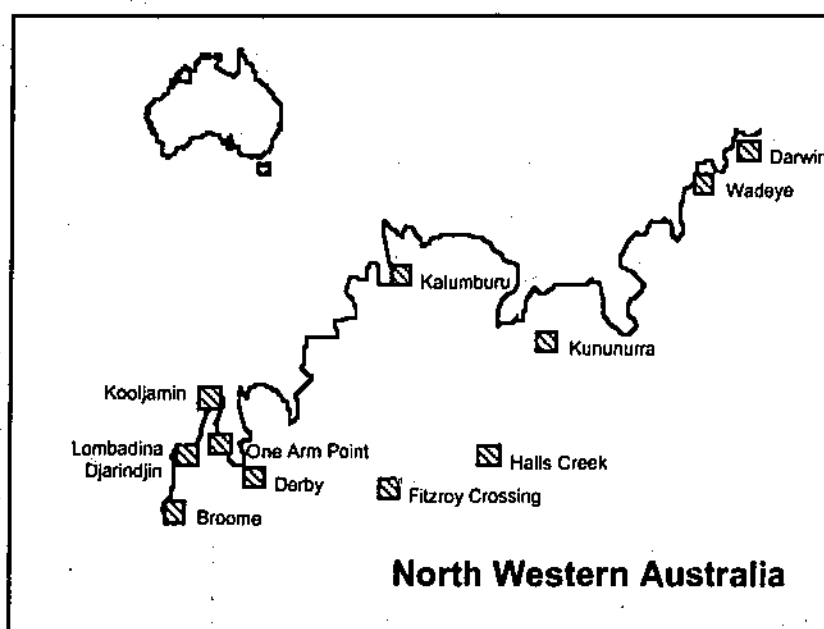
The data base was updated after each stage of the study and computer based data retrieval programs (ZyIndex and WordCruncher) used to iteratively analyse the data with constant negotiation between data and interpretations. Emerging themes were continuously adapted after each stage of the study as new data were compared with previous observations and responses in the search for consistencies, discrepancies and negative cases. This enabled continual challenges and modifications to be made to themes and further negotiation of meanings to be undertaken with informants during successive stages of the study.

Over the duration of the study new themes emerged while others were removed or modified. The process was concluded when the author felt that additional data would yield no additional changes to the themes and their verification was satisfactorily completed. The following sections outline the research activities and time frame for each stage of the research.

#### 4.5 RESEARCH SITES

The data for this study were collected within three Aboriginal communities in the remote north-western region of Australia. The first two (Lombadina and Kalumburu) are in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, while the third (Wadeye) is across the state border in the Northern Territory. Wadeye adjoins the Kimberley and Arnhem land regions but is closer to the major town of Kununurra than either Lombadina or Kalumburu (Refer to Map Two). All three sites have been strongly influenced by mission contact, although each now represents a different phase of influence. At one site the mission maintains a strong social and economic presence, operating the school and church services as well as craft shops and stores. Although the community has been officially self governing for almost twenty years, the mission continues to wield significant control over the daily

activities of many residents and works closely with the elected council and non-Aboriginal administration. At a second site the mission has also lost official control but maintains some control through continued social and economic activities. While there is conflict between the mission and the non-Aboriginal administration at this site, many of the residents link themselves to the mission's activities. At the third site the mission has physically vacated the community although a church service is conducted each week by a visiting regional minister of the church.

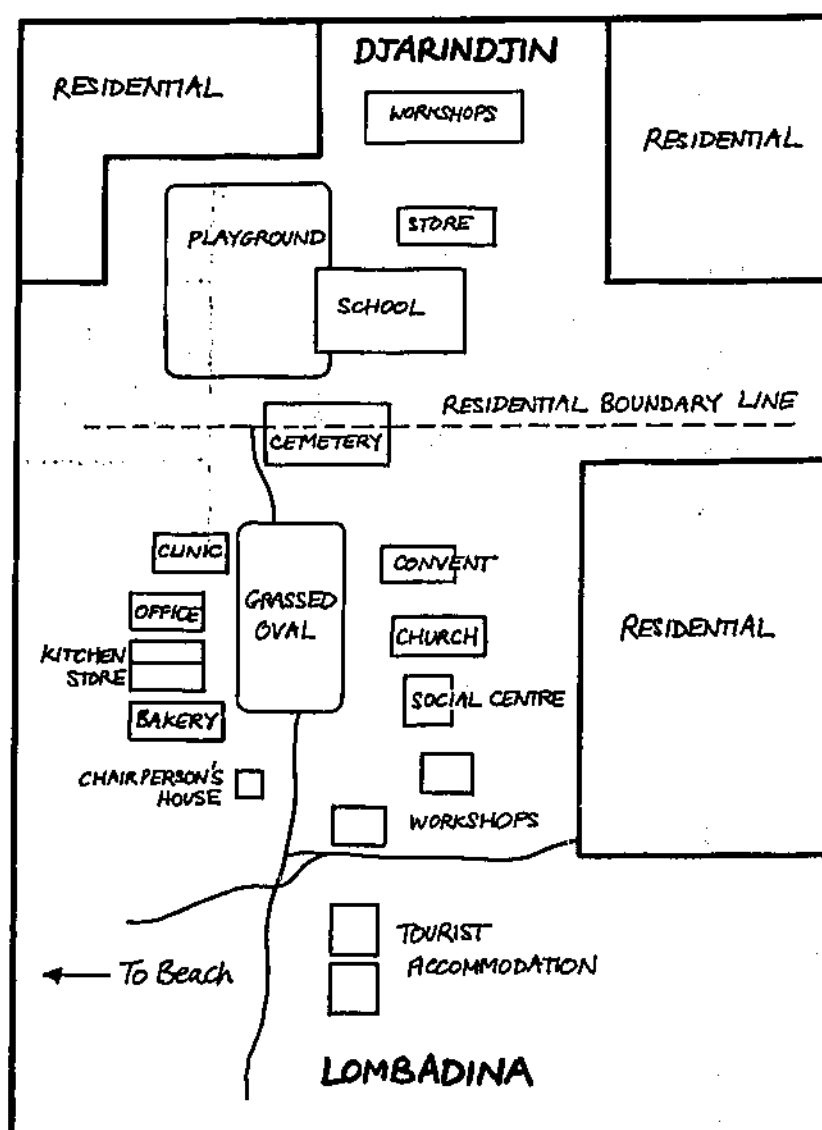


MAP TWO: NORTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

All three are coastal communities and exemplify communities where tribal groups have been combined through external pressure. While Lombadina and Kalumburu are small (less than 70 and 300 residents respectively), Wadeye is one of the largest remote Aboriginal communities in Australia (more than 1,500 residents). While all three are isolated for some months each year by monsoonal weather conditions, Kalumburu and Wadeye are also a significant distance from major towns (four hundred kilometres). Lombadina is within a two hour drive of two major towns. Although all three are remote, self contained, Aboriginal controlled communities, they exhibit significant cultural, social and political differences.

#### 4.5.1 LOMBADINA

The first Catholic mission in the Kimberley was established at Beagle Bay on the Dampier Peninsula in 1891 with a mission outpost being established at Lombadina in 1911. A church and dormitories were erected at Lombadina, gardens were established and beef cattle introduced. The mission withdrew in 1955 and an internal political dispute resulted in the splitting of the community in 1985. The community of Lombadina retained the mission buildings and name while the larger community took control of the mission cattle and lands and reverted to the original Aboriginal site name of Djarindjin (Refer to Map Three).



MAP THREE: LOMBADINA AND DJARINDJIN



Separated by only a wire fence, the two communities consist of the same family groups who share common facilities, including a Catholic school, a health clinic administered by two full time non-Aboriginal nurses, and a Christian cemetery, (which forms part of the boundary between the communities). All houses have reticulated electricity and water. While residents move freely between the two communities, an intense political rivalry is still evident.

Lombadina has a population of about sixty, including thirty employed on the CDEP program and nine children, but there is a constant movement of people between the community and country towns, such as Broome and Derby. These towns are situated some two hundred kilometres away in opposite directions. The cities of Darwin and Perth are around two days away by road. Since the 1985 separation, one man has retained the chairperson position in Lombadina and has imposed strict rules of behaviour. Referred to in the community as a 'benevolent dictator', he maintains tight control of the administration of workshops, tourist facilities and community equipment. His strict management has resulted in substantial economic development within the community as well as a relatively high standard of living.

While the mission and boarding school are no longer operative, the old church is maintained and a weekly service conducted by a Catholic priest who services the surrounding communities. The old mission bakery is still operational, with a non-Aboriginal baker producing three bakes a week. There is also a small shop stocking food and household items, workshops where machinery is maintained and local artefacts produced, an office which doubles as a tourist shop for the sale of artefacts and finally a local social club, which is the only legal supplier of alcohol in the community. In the time between the first and third visit to the community, the social club was relocated from a small tin shed to a much larger weatherboard building and equipped with a pool table and improved facilities. Sales of alcoholic drinks are restricted to five cans of low alcohol beer per day and this is only

available to individuals who work on the community CDEP program. The workshop and bar are managed and operated by the chairman, and the store and office by the chairman's wife. In addition to road maintenance equipment, the community owns a four wheel drive vehicle and a power boat, both of which are under the control of the chairman. There are about eight private vehicles in the community. A three bedroom building, with washing and bathroom facilities, has been erected to service the community operated tourist venture while tourists' meals are produced in the old mission kitchen.

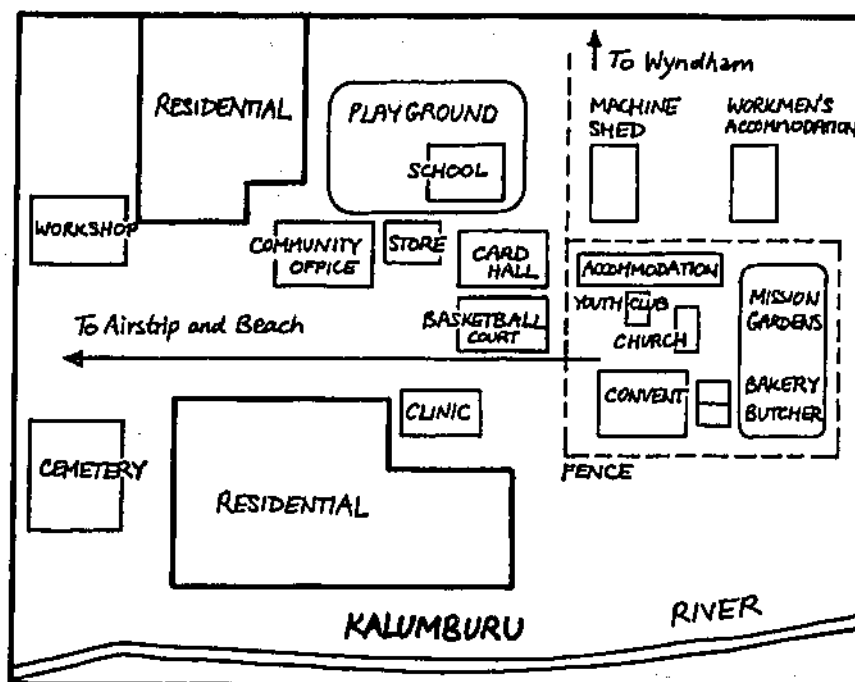
Djarindjin has a population of about 250 and a much larger and better stocked store, operated by a non-Aboriginal store manager. They have a larger community office, also administered by a non-Aboriginal male. The community owns and operates the electric generators that supply power to both communities. There are no community vehicles and, despite their larger population, Djarindjin has about the same number of private vehicles as Lombadina.

Consumables are road freighted from Broome, although the dirt road is often impassable during the wet season. Dirt air strips suited to light planes are located at the nearby One Arm Point community and at Kooljabin, a tourist facility owned and operated jointly by the One Arm Point and Djarindjin communities and situated twenty kilometres from each. This facility has four simple cabins, a dining room, restaurant and office, plus camping facilities. It is operated by non-Aboriginal administrators.

#### 4.5.2 KALUMBURU

The Kalumburu community is similar in size to the Lomadina-Djarindjin community having a population of around 300 with over half being children. There is an imbalance between males and females with many of the men either working or incarcerated in nearby towns. The community commenced in 1935 with the establishment of a mission that had been relocated from the nearby seaside site due

to water shortage problems. The mission used a variety of coercive measures to draw in the six diverse tribal groups that inhabited the area at that time. The community still displays considerable disharmony and mistrust between families, although some of this may be attributed to the large number of outsiders who reside in the community following the marriages that occur when males leave the community to work in the larger regional towns.



MAP FOUR: KALUMBURU

Located in the north-western extremity of the Kimberley, the community is one of the most isolated in Australia. Although the road trip to Darwin is around six hours, the road is impassable during the wet season and the community is reliant upon monthly transport of goods by barge together with daily transport of fresh foods and perishable goods by light plane.

While the houses are reticulated with water and electricity, the standard of housing is the lowest of the three communities and, during the wet season, flooding often causes the sewerage system to overflow with a further deterioration in community health standards and frequent outbreaks of hookworm. The community

has a state run school and health clinic, community offices and hall, a general store operated by the council but managed by mission personnel, and an electricity generation facility and large vehicle maintenance shed.

The mission buildings, in direct contrast to community housing, are well built and meticulously maintained. The mission stocks its own food supplies that are supplemented from reticulated gardens and bakes fresh bread each day. Bread surplus to mission requirements is sold at the store and referred to by residents as 'home bread' as distinct from the 'town bread' that is flown in daily. Home bread is the first to sell out each day. The mission still operates a weekly disco, games nights and church services, all of which are well supported by residents. There is a strong undercurrent of disagreement between the mission and non-Aboriginal administrators about how the community should be controlled and most residents take sides on this issue. The CDEP scheme is controlled by the non-Aboriginal administrator but, because of the lack of males, operates on a small scale.

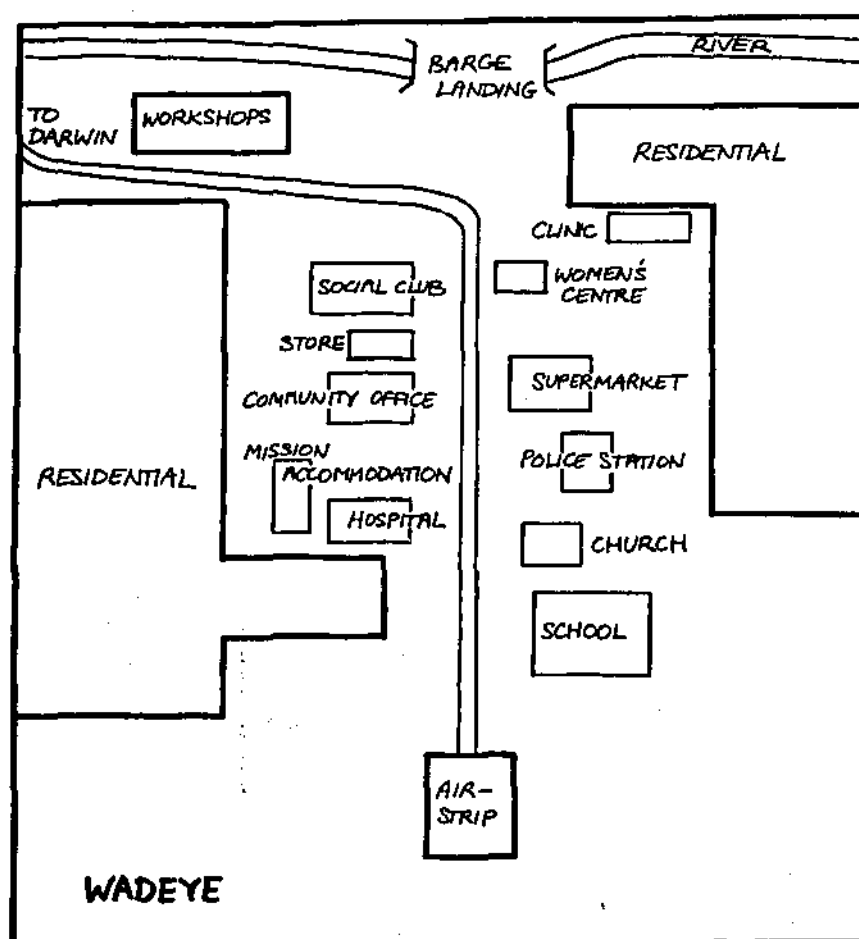
#### 4.5.3 WADEYE

The community of Wadeye is situated some 400 kilometres south-west of Darwin by road but is isolated for up to five months during the wet season (Refer Map Five). Light aircraft provide daily access to Darwin, enabling the supply of perishables and urgent requirements. Consumables are shipped in once each month by barge.

The community originated from a Catholic mission established in 1935 and moved to its current site in 1939. The population at that time included eleven tribal groups, who were in constant conflict. These groups were combined by the mission, which forced the adoption of the predominant Murinpatta language.

Originally named Port Keats, the community changed its name to Wadeye, the Murinpatta name for the area, following the Federal government's granting of

independence from the mission in 1975. The mission has continued to maintain a strong presence and five sisters and two brothers administer the school and church.



MAP FIVE: WADEYE

The community has approximately 1500 Aboriginal residents with about twenty non-Aborigines, including mission workers, school teachers, council and store managers, health workers, social club manager, an electrician, a mechanic, and police officers. The community has a reticulated water and electricity supply, a machinery maintenance facility, and football oval. It operates a hospital, gymnasium, carpentry and plumbing workshop, fuel depot, sewing factory, womens' craft centre, and social club. The community also generates its own electricity. The main road through the community is bituminised.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONTEMPORARY CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

*No more sharing  
What the hunter brings.  
Now we work for money,  
Then pay it back for things.*

*No more firesticks  
That made the whites scoff.  
Now all electricity,  
And no better off.  
Oodgeroo (1988)*

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Upon arrival at each of the three remote Aboriginal communities of this study, my first impressions were of communities similar to those found in most of outback Australia. Each community has conventional housing, a local school and supermarket, people wear European style clothing, view world events and national football games on television, use electrical appliances such as stoves, refrigerators and freezers, buy nationally branded packaged foodstuffs, and own four-wheel-drive vehicles. It eventually became evident however, that tradition oriented ritual activities, in which initiation, body paint and clapsticks are used, are still practiced. Men hide sacred objects and sacred areas are carefully protected from unwanted trespassers. On one occasion, traditional dancing, which had little meaning to the non-Aborigines watching, brought screams of delight from an Aboriginal audience. The general impressions suggest a blending of cultures.

Unlike the average Australian rural town, the streets are littered with rubbish, most of the residents are unemployed, abject poverty is obvious, poor sanitary conditions prevail, hungry dogs roam the streets alongside naked toddlers with mucous encrusted noses, unshaven old men with cataracts sit silently in the shade of buildings and communal card games run continuously from mid morning until late at night.

With the partial destruction of indigenous culture and the imposition of European cultural and consumption practices, Aborigines had the options of adopting, adapting or accommodating the new consumption practices, and did so to varying degrees. Outright rejection in favour of traditional lifestyle practices was not a viable option as most were marginalised and denied the opportunities available to most Australian citizens.

As mainstream Australian attitudes and government policies toward Aborigines changed, the people of these remote communities were given the opportunity of

retaining the consumption practices that had evolved and revitalising suppressed tradition oriented practices. In so doing, they also syncretised mainstream Australian consumption practices with tradition oriented practices. Generally, each of the communities studied has developed its own unique culture of consumption. This chapter describes the behaviours observed and explains how an Aboriginal consumer culture has evolved in each of these remote communities, through a process involving degrees of adoption, adaption, syncretisation and cultural revitalisation.

## 5.2 FOOD CONSUMPTION

Following the establishment of pastoral stations and missions in the Kimberley, Aborigines supplemented, then replaced, traditional foods with colonial staples such as sugar, flour, meat, tea and tobacco. This is not unlike the adoption of novel goods such as sugar, tobacco and manufactured products by the English working class that was outlined in Chapter Two. Because of the minimum of effort required by Aborigines to obtain and prepare these goods, together with the absence of Aboriginal prohibitions against their consumption, they were rapidly adopted. Once the benefits of missions and stations became known, they became powerful enticements to replace nomadic practices with sedentary ones and served to coerce the Aborigines. Jean, a seventy year old Aboriginal woman still remembers being brought to the mission at Lombadina in the 1920s. She recounted how she had been born 'in the sand' and travelled with her father and mother along the Dampier Peninsula. Because of shortages of bush food at that time, her father had chopped wood for a settler to supplement their food supply. Jean explained the events leading to her arrival at the bush camp near the mission, how she joined the mission and what then occurred:



*He used to chop wood for them and look after their house, and we used to go there sometimes to get something to eat from him. And I don't know, maybe the boss might have said something to him to tell my father to -you know to perhaps try and see if the mission will take us, so we wandered here. Mum had relatives here and her first cousins and sisters here and they talked her into coming in so she came. I had to go to be put into a dormitory, I was living up on the camp for a while and I think sisters or somebody said to mum to try and get me into the dormitory, to go to school or something. I didn't take to the dormitory very well. I asked Mum to come and stay with me and she did. The sisters let her stay in the dormitory for a couple of nights, three nights, or something like that. I couldn't speak a word of English then. I kept talking in Bard and of course the sisters were very kindly, coaxed me to stay. I used to eat with a sister from Mother Therese. She'd take me to her room, sit on her knees. She would put a little bowl on the floor, of rice or whatever they had and I felt all right. I was happy.*

She was only around eight at the time, but has a vivid recollection of the ways in which food was collected and shared in the traditional manner, and the skills she had learnt:

*Father and Mother taught me that. We'd catch kangaroo with dogs you know what they kill kangaroos with. They taught us how to kill the lizards. We used to watch the hole. When the hole is buried from the inside, the sand has been pushed to the entrance, the lizard is inside. So we had to walk around where we found a sort of shallow covering, the place where they probably built for themselves and something happen to them so they hide inside. We put our foot on top. You with me? So I put my foot there, or a stick. Easy to find them, so you put it there so he had no way to get out or get away, and then we would have to look up on the trees too because sometimes they get out and climb up there. I wandered around picking them up and feeding on them. The older people would tell us what to eat. One said to me one day, he said to me, "You watch what the birds eat, what the bird feeds you take." Plus they taught us how to support each other, to eat altogether. Everyone got their share. It had to be shared. The people knew. Mother always knew. There was never any*

*grumbling like, she didn't give me any fish or anything like that. They knew. Traditional things you know.*

Besides the hunting of small animals and gathering of bush food, the Bardi people had a strong association with the sea and this is maintained in contemporary communities. Three forms of tradition oriented fishing practices were also explained by Grace, another older Aboriginal woman:

*It's like a potato and they use that as a drug or something to make the fishes all sleep, drunk and they go up to the top or run beneath rocks, try to find clear place, and when they are resting, trying to, that's when they speared it. But they don't poison, you know its not poison because you can eat that fish, even though they've been drugged. Fishes come to life again. And there's another way too of poisoning, not poisoning, drugging fishes. With branches of the tree what they call Elena and you pounded it to pieces and then you mix it with the sand, just leave it there and then push it under the rocks. You do that till the dirt is finished and when the time, even before that is finished you can see the fishes are moving, trying to get away from that area, and some of them really throw themselves right up on the beach. And another way of getting fish was in rock traps, what we call mire. Build up rocks about so high and then men, with their sticks or wire, metal rods or branches they beat the tide when its, when its about. They can't touch water yet, when they start to beat the tide up towards the fish trap and they, and the tide is going out at the same time and by beating the tides the fish run back to the rocks and they're trapped there. The tide leaves them behind and we pick them up. And then there's another way of getting fish is, night fishing with paper bark with the tee tree. The fishes go to sleep at night and when they see the light they open their eyes and go back to sleep. And that's when you go in with your spear and spear as many as you want as long as they're there. That's what we call Undook. Undook fishing is night fishing.*

The drugging and spearing of fish is now performed for tourists. In addition, turtle and dugong also provide food and I was served dugong during my first stay in Lombadina. Jean also described the catching, cooking and sharing of turtle during her childhood:

*And all the women were sitting under the shade of a tree, and watch out for the people to come back, and we saw this one raft coming back and a man got off it and he got a heap of leaves and sand and everything and threw it up in the sky. We knew for certain there was turtle there. That was the signal. So we ran down and my mum said to me, "Go and jump on that turtle, on the chest, and sit on it." So I went down there. We all went. I was the first of the children there so I sat on him, you know lying on its back. I sat on it. Once you do that the turtle catcher just walks away, it's yours and you give it however you want to. Cut it up and share it how you want. So that happen, but all the eggs they are cooked, like when it's cooked, then they open it up, cut up all the legs and flippers and all them things. They cook that in a saucepan with, fat, fish, eggs and blood. It was beautiful. All the salt comes out of the water. It's never cooked in fresh water.*

Traditional sharing practices were also recounted by Paul, a Bardi man in his late forties, who is regarded as the current Lombadina bush food expert. Paul related the practices of sharing still used when a boy undergoing initiation catches his first dugong:

*The tail that will be for the uncle. He's gotta be first. So if he gets a dugong, the uncle has to be there. And then he gives every different pieces to who he wants to give you know.*

Traditional foods still play a part in contemporary life, although it is now regarded more as a leisure pursuit than a necessity for survival. Alec, a young Aboriginal man at Lombadina, described his attitude toward traditional hunting and fishing as, "My own cultural way of living. It's my relaxation." Lombadina informants said that they no longer hunted much because most of the smaller animals had been wiped out by fires and there is a scarcity of bush fruits due to poor seasonal weather conditions. Paul, however, claims that most bush foods taste tart and that children, in particular, have developed a taste for the sweeter goods that are easily available from the local stores. This is, perhaps, not unlike the attraction to sugar as a sweetener among the English during the eighteenth century (Mintz

1985). The collection of bush foods is a popular tourist activity and includes guided walks in search of bush food.

Paul, the person responsible for these tours, showed me eight varieties of trees that bore edible fruit during different seasons, together with samples of fruits and gums. Tasting these reinforced his comments about tartness and flavour. He also showed us fruits and mushrooms which were not edible and trees that provide wood for making weapons. Although he is the supposed 'expert' on bush food, his knowledge seemed more limited than Jean and Grace who could associate bush foods and fish supplies with seasonal factors. It appears that thorough knowledge about traditional bush food is, in fact, dying out.

On the other hand, local school teachers told of teenage students spending two or three days collecting trochus shells to earn quick money whenever a special event, such as a festival, came to nearby Broome. The children had no trouble with collecting despite the treacherous tides. The weekends are sacrosanct at Lombadina and devoted usually to fishing and camping by most residents of the community. I was invited to join one of these weekend trips to nearby Rumble Bay using the community four-wheel-drive and boat. Nets were used to catch bait before the boat was taken to the nearby reefs. Following this outing, freezers were filled with enough fish to last the week. While the sharing ethos is still strong, it was not obvious on this occasion. Ben, the community chairman claims that the freezer has changed the sharing ethos:

*Well they've got fridges today, freezers for things that they can keep. They are sharing still, as much as they can, but only to whoever they want, not to everybody like it was before.*

At Wadeye, hunting and fishing activities are largely confined to 'bush week', a three week school break during which the majority of the town camp out and survive by hunting and fishing. There is also a period each year when wild geese

pass through the area and the larger families send members out to hunt them. The geese are then shared among members of the extended family.

It was interesting to note that the store runs 'bush week specials' and all groups that I observed purchased drums of flour, powdered milk, tea, sugar and canned food to supplement their diets. It appears that the abundance of animals, fish and bush foods, is not always reliable. This interpretation was confirmed by Steve, a twenty year old Aboriginal man who was packing his vehicle in readiness for a trip the following day. His response to a question on the necessity of these foods was:

*Well they will probably live mainly on what they take. You can never be sure how much you will get. We have been out there before and haven't caught a damn thing. You might get the long neck turtles out of the river, or roos that might be around. Birds they might even get. If they have access to a car they can also get to a tidal river. You could get fish there. Two years ago there was a big flock of flying foxes. So they were shooting them for food. Sometimes when they are out there they get sweet potato out of the ground. That's more like for kids. It keeps them occupied and they get a feed out of it as well.*

The enthusiasm shown toward bush week is unmistakable. Traditional foods seem secondary to the opportunity for families to escape to seclusion. When I asked Steve what they did all day, he replied:

*Some of them listen to their walkman. Or go swimming or sit around talking. Walk or play cards. One of them might have a footy so they will kick that around for awhile. Just lounge around, whatever.*

At Kalumburu, the majority of the residents go 'to the beach' each Sunday. A variety of community and private vehicles drive people to a variety of local beaches about twenty kilometres from the township. I was invited to join two staff from the mission, Uncle Tom ( a seventy year old non-Aboriginal clergyman) and Zara (a twenty year old non-Aboriginal female assistant at the mission), a group of four Aboriginal women and about twenty Aboriginal children. The rough graded sand road to the beach was littered with household refuse and discarded household

appliances. Upon arrival, a net was set and twelve large fish soon caught. Three open fires, made of wood washed up by the sea, were prepared between stones and sheltered behind drums. The fires were reduced to coals and the uncleaned fish were thrown on. The subsequent events are described from field notes:

*We were invited by Fatima, to sit down and eat with Theresa and herself. They sat cross legged alongside the fire and were eating a fish set out on the ground on top of leaves from the bush apple tree, which served as a combination table and cloth. Fatima told us that these leaves were the best and laughingly rebuked Zara when she broke some leaves from the wrong tree. When I asked her why these leaves were the best she said that some of the others could make you sick. One of the young boys obliged by getting us some bush apple leaves. The leaves at least kept the fish out of the sand. Grocery litter of packaging and cans as well as old fridges and washing machines surrounded the site. Their fish, a good sized mullet nearly one foot in length, had not been scaled or gutted, but dropped on the coals whole, as it had been taken from the net. Theresa and Fatima ate with their fingers simply pulling the flesh and skin from the bones. Marty and I took a smaller fish from the fire and ate with our fingers by removing the skin first and then picking the flesh from the bones. It was nice and fresh tasting but lacked salt. They asked how we liked it and I replied, "Good but it could do with some salt." This was remedied by sending one of the children to the beach to collect salt water in an empty milk powder can. The fish was then dipped into the salt water before eating. One of the children, about eight years of age, arrived asking for food. Theresa pulled the head of the fish off with the guts attached and offered it to him to eat. He left smiling and obviously very happy with his allotment. Two of the other young kids drank tea from a dried milk can in which they dunked mission made bread. This supplemented the oranges that Uncle Tom had brought from the mission. At this stage the children had not eaten any of the fish that were caught. Bernadette was sitting on a blanket spread on the ground about three feet away from us. She was cuddling her baby. I asked her what she had missed most of all when she had spent her five years at New Norcia school. She said that it was her family and most especially the food like this that she was eating today. I asked her what was so special about it and she replied that it was better*

*cooked natural like this rather than like gudija food. I asked them, "Could you still live on bush food if you had to?" They replied, "Not now because the bush fruit is not ready until December." I responded by asking them if they could survive when the bush food was in season. They then proceeded to point out a number of available delicacies nearby. There was a bush apple tree which had little fruits, a Kurrajong which had seeds, and the boab. I said that I had tried eating Boab seeds last year and they were quite nice but very dry and had made me thirsty. They laughed and said that this was not the best way to eat them. They said they were best roasted when green. This conversation was the signal for the children to begin searching for food and showing that they too knew what to collect if they were hungry. Three scrambled up the nearest tree to collect green boabs while others went in search of the bush apple,s which I had just been told, were not in season. (17 April 1994)*

With the exception of fish in Lombadina, and geese at Wadeye, however, the consumption of traditional or natural foods in the three communities appears to be minimal. Even in Kalumburu, despite the obvious pleasure of Sunday at the beach and the associated fish consumption, the event seemed to be far more directed toward socialising than consuming.

The colonial staples rationed by the missions at the beginning of the century resulted in less Aboriginal reliance on traditional foodstuffs. This was reduced even further as the missionaries attempted to instil a work ethic around the skills of gardening. Remnants of these activities are still evident in each of the communities. The gardens at Wadeye have disappeared but two of the mission staff who had been there for over forty years described lush gardens, reticulated from the river, which had contained bananas, pineapples, watermelons and sweet potato in abundance. There had also been a substantial cattle herd administered by the mission. At Lombadina only the large palms and tropical trees survive, although carefully tended gardens of European vegetables and fruit were vividly described by a number of the older informants. The cattle herd had long since been removed and

Jean recounted the destruction of the herd and the associated work skills that had abounded during its existence:

*They did their work and they knew what they were doing. Today it's hard, it is sad to say. It's just sitting down in the camps you know, in the village doing just what they want to do whether they want to work or they want to do nothing. And that's all. It is a sad state. I'm really sad because the last muster that went through was in 1979. The cattle now are being driven into yards and carted on trucks. It is sad isn't it. Even the cattle are not free.*

At Kalumburu, the gardens are still in operation, although on a more limited scale. The mission is surrounded by enormous mango trees and contains tropical trees, such as custard apple, as well as citrus.

The missions were criticised by some informants for introducing addictive European foods but, in their defence, they also introduced nutritious foods, especially through the gardens. The current situation of store dependence, which has arisen since the introduction of the cash welfare economy, however, is far more destructive of Aboriginal health. The preferred food options in the local stores are the almost unchanged colonial day offerings of flour, sugar, tea and meat. Added to this list of goods have been, tobacco for adults, and sweets and soft drinks for children. Over the years, these foods have resulted in marked increases in obesity among Aborigines, the development of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and reduced growth among young children (Gracey and Spargo 1987).

It is difficult to accurately describe daily consumption practices as they vary considerably within and across communities, depending upon such variables as the number and ages of people within the household (as many as 25 per house with multiple welfare recipients); whether or not the father is present (in one community a significant proportion of fathers was either working or incarcerated in prisons located in distant towns); the proportion of household money spent on gambling or alcohol; and proximity to welfare payment day.



The following analysis describes the management structure and stock of the stores, observations of daily food shopping practices, and discussions with teachers, mission staff, and Aboriginal adults and children. It must be pointed out that these remote communities are doubly disadvantaged in terms of nutrition as food costs are much higher due to transportation costs. This is especially so in Kalumburu and Wadeye, which are cut off during the wet season. Here, barges are used to transport food from the major centres, while fresh fruit and vegetables, milk and bread are flown in, escalating prices even further.

The Djarindjin community store is operated by their council, managed by a non-Aboriginal administrator and staffed by Aboriginal residents. The store at Lombadina is very small, operated by one person, and stocks food and household consumables. Djarindjin is a larger supermarket style general store with a broader stock of goods. This store has installed a computerised stock control system and a \$1.7 million turnover for the previous twelve months had resulted in a profit of \$114,000, compared to \$ 200 for the year before. The difference was attributed to the reduction in losses incurred through staff giving goods to needy relatives and friends and through unpaid bookups.<sup>1</sup>

The Kalumburu store is administered by non-Aboriginal mission volunteers and stocks food, clothing, household supplies, white goods and a wide variety of personal items such as toys. The mission store had voluntarily closed at the council's request after their store was opened. However, when the council store made huge financial losses, the mission had been requested to temporarily take over store management. Consideration had been being given to installing a computer system similar to that of Djarindjin, although it is uncertain who will take over the management. The following field note lists food products available:

*Fresh fruit and vegetables: oranges, red apples, potatoes, onions, garlic, capsicum and rock melons*

*Dairy produce: eggs, instant milk powder, margarine, butter, cheese, and iced coffee.*

*Meat: tinned corned beef, Polish sausage, frozen beef steaks.*

*Packaged foods: frozen pies, pizza, tinned spaghetti and baked beans, sugar, salt, rice, one minute oats, bread.*

*Beverages: orange and fruit juices, soft drinks, tea bags, milo.*

*Restricted access: cigarettes are stored behind the counter while ice creams are kept in a freezer that is out of bounds.*

During the three weekly activity sessions, the mission operates a small shop attached to the activity centre. On Monday nights they sell about one hundred pies at two dollars each and, on Friday evenings, about one hundred mission-made chicken salads containing cheese, egg, chicken, tomato and coleslaw at three dollars each. On Saturday afternoon, about one hundred and twenty micro rolls are sold at three dollars each. In addition, they sell soft drinks, ice creams and sweets. These prices are very low compared to the cost of food in the community store.

In addition to supplementing children's daily food, the mission manages pensioner welfare payments. The administrator allocates daily allowances, which are recorded onto individual cards. She also encourages pensioners to purchase food twice daily so that others can not steal from them.

The Wadeye general store, like that in Djarindjin, is council owned, operated by a non-Aboriginal manager, and staffed by locals. The following is a field note description of the store layout:

*Aisle one comprises mops, brooms, buckets and assorted cleaning utensils on the wall faced by four shelves of detergents and soaps. The second aisle has a full shelf of tea bags, a shelf of flour one of sugar and a fourth of rice. On the opposite side is a shelf of biscuits, canned spaghetti and jams. The final aisle contains canned meats faced by a fridge of*

*frozen steak, sausages and mince plus vegetables and ice cream. There is an open fridge of onions, potatoes and eggs. There are four upright fridges at the end of the aisles. One contains a variety of soft drink cans and 1.25 litre bottles of soft drinks. The second contains milk and flavoured milk. The other two are empty. The shelves at the rear of the store contain fishing lines, ten litre petrol cans, electric frypans and electric fans.*

In addition, a take away food shop is attached to the council-operated club but only opens for one hour at lunch time and during official club hours from five to seven on six days each week. They sell heated fast foods, such as chico rolls, pies, and chips, as well as canned soft drinks and sweets. Next door to the club, and opposite the general store, is the mission-operated bakery store. As well as their own freshly baked bread, they sell hot pies, chicken wings, soft drink and chocolate bars. As a token gesture toward health concerns, the bakery had stopped the sale of soft drinks and chocolate bars but reintroduced them when the children began to cross the road to buy them at the general store.

It seems that the majority of people in all communities shop on a daily basis, a practice explained by Nick, a young Aboriginal man at Wadeye:

*There is the problem of storage if they get too much. There is nowhere to put it. Besides there is a lot of sharing among the family, so it would just go quicker. People would be well fed for a while but it would not last. So you just get what you need each day. Then there is the card games. Some of them run out of money. And they keep the money for beer instead of food. The kids will go to their aunty if they are hungry.*

A Kalumburu woman's food purchases for the day is illustrated in the following:

*She had two kilos of sugar which she said would last two days, a kilo of rice which would last two meals, a can of spaghetti to scramble with one dozen eggs for one meal and a tin of ham to mix with rice for a second meal. There were also four potatoes, a can of tomatoes and a package of minced beef. She explained that she already had tea and bread at home.*

*She was uncertain how many would be eating with her (Field notes 20/4/94).*

There is a constant stream of children around each of the stores. Pies, icy poles, soft drinks and sweets are the common fare. Most children carry notes rather than coins. Many, without money, carry mugs of sugared tea into which they dip bread. Bruce, a thirty five year old non-Aboriginal male, married to an Aboriginal woman at Lombadina, spoke about the local eating habits.

*Food was a bit of a shock for me. Seeing people's diets and it still shocks me the amount of rubbish that I see people eating. Lollies, chocolates and cool drinks, and chips and pies and all the things that are bad for us are the main foods consumed. You can't do much except talking to people about their diets. They have white flour, white rice, white bread, sugar and that sort of thing but lack of vegetables.*

When asked what the typical daily food consumption pattern would be in Wadeye, David, a young Aboriginal man responded:

*It's day by day consumption. They don't really plan ahead a lot. Like its not very often you will find a fridge or a freezer in a house. Like you may have bought your weethix from the day before, then you've got your powdered milk and that will do your breakfast, sort of thing. Take-away for lunch. Like they will just go to the shop and buy a pie or something like that, or chips or whatever, and that will be lunch. In the afternoon they will buy frozen meat like steaks or things and they will be thawed out by night time. It's a day by day living. Some of them you will find have tucker boxes sort of thing. Lockable boxes that they can store bread, tinned meats and drinks in. Non perishable sort of stuff. They will have a store of that. There is a lot of junk food for the young kids. Soft drinks, lollies, chips. I s'pose at night time they would cook. They would have a cooked meal then. Lunch time maybe. It sort of varies a bit from family to family. Who is around at that time of day. What food they have at that time of day.*

Margaret, the mission administrator, commented on many occasions about the lack of budgeting skills among the women of the community. The appeal of expensive consumer items, combined with limited budgeting skills, claims Margaret, impacts even further on nutrition levels. Muriel, a thirty year old female informant at Kalumburu, continually requested one of the team to purchase cassette tapes for her. She thrust a four hundred dollar roll of notes at the team member and requested that she mail her back the latest tapes from Perth. On hearing of this Margaret commented: "They waste their money on things like this instead of feeding the kids. And when they win at cards it's even worse." Jenny, the store administrator added: "They spend their money on a heap of expensive junk instead of food. That's why they're hungry."

Two community administrators complained about the continued mission presence and involvement. One stated: "They need to kick away the crutch or they will never get anywhere." However, the missions often provide the only nutritious meals and, in some cases, the only meals that children get during the day. At Wadeye, the mission has an arrangement with the council whereby a service fee is deducted from welfare payments prior to distribution. This is used by the school to ensure a minimum dietary level. One of the sisters at the school described this process:

*At playtime they get a good sandwich, two big slices of bread with egg or cheese and a big pile of it and they get fruit juice, and if they don't get fruit juice they get a slice of fruit. That is done daily. This is more or less to ensure reasonable nutrition, otherwise they would go without it. They could starve, but the drinkers, the money will be there all the time for that. No matter what else goes short that drink money is always there.*

At Kalumburu, there is no such relationship with the council, rather an arms length arrangement in which the mission supplies nutritious lunches through their store. On school days they supply about one hundred and twenty tubs of hot food to the store by 8.30 each morning. These are priced at \$2.50 and vary in content

each day. They include stew, soup and rice, chicken and chips, and rissoles or sausages with vegetables. Mothers took these home so that children would get a reasonable meal when school finished around noon. However, there is no guarantee that those children most in need receive the food.

The poor level of health among the indigenous people of these remote communities is illustrated by the high frequency of attendance at health clinics. The nurse from the clinic servicing Lombadina and Djarindjin reported diabetic problems associated with the people's diets:

*There are a few diabetics that are quite severe diabetics but have functioned with that for twenty years, but if we can modify their diets just slightly, to eat less junk food, soft drink and chips and stuff from the shops, we believe we will have a better success rate rather than people coping on insulin and upsetting their whole balance.*

Additional comments were made regarding the habit of having children shared around in extended families:

*They're just left with a whole lot of different carers. On the one hand that can be good to have a whole family which the children feel comfortable to go to. It often means that there is no continuity or care, the child's passed from one family to the other, or one family over to another all over the place.*

At Kalumburu, the clinic is also concerned with the high incidence of hookworm spread mainly through unsatisfactory sanitation systems. Children worsen the situation by picking up and eating food dropped onto the ground. Despite repeated warnings many continue this practice.

Similar frustrations are evident at Wadeye. Clinic signs state, "NO HUMBUG. NO SORES-NO DRESSING, PROPER SICK OR BURNT OR BLEEDING EMERGENCIES ONLY" and "NO METHO KEPT HERE". Sister Moira is highly critical of dietary and cooking practices, saying that most women prefer to use prepared frozen and tinned foods rather than make the time or effort to prepare proper foods. She is saddened that gambling

makes the situation even worse. She went on to describe the school children's health in relation to welfare payment time:

*On pension day the children gorge themselves to the extent that they come to school with diarrhoea. When the money runs out two or three days before the next pension day they have no food and they have diarrhoea again as a result of malnutrition.*

The health problems at Kalumburu are the most severe of all, involving hookworm infestations caused by inadequate sewerage, myasia or proportional stunting and diabetes due to poor diet, as well as chronic ear disease, trachoma and gastroenteritis. Michael Gracey, who has been researching health problems in this community since 1973, spoke briefly about the situation:

*Fifteen percent of the children suffer from Myasia, proportional stunting caused through poor diet. The biggest problem however, is hookworm which is passed around through either bare feet as the worm bores through the skin or from fecal-oral contact. This causes gastro-intestinal bleeding and diarrhoea. The kids shit everywhere and conditions deteriorate further. The living conditions here are absolutely deplorable.*

The introduction of a cash economy and European foods, he wrote, resulted in a deterioration in Aboriginal nutrition and health.

*The traditional behaviour pattern of immediate consumption; sharing amongst relatives and clan members; the relative immobility of Aborigines within the social structure; gambling; alcohol abuse; poor prospects for employment; and inadequate facilities for food storage (Gracey, Sullivan and Spargo 1988, p.37).*

One traditional consumption practice still used by a few of the older people in one of the communities is the smoking of narcotic stringy bark ashes by men and the chewing of the mildly narcotic pitchery plant by women. Informants said that the pitchery plant is sometimes used to pacify babies. Cigarette smoking, however, is the common drug of addiction among males and females. Storekeepers reported that tobacco comprises a significant proportion of weekly expenditure on food.

Marijuana smoking is also evident, particularly in the communities close to Broome, where it is readily available.

In summary, food is regarded by the Aborigines of the three communities as a purely functional good, while traditional foods are prized as part of highly desired social events rather than nutritious alternatives to processed foods. The school teachers in each community claim that choice is strongly influenced by television and there is a large demand for high sugar content foods and other addictive goods, such as tobacco and alcohol. Allocation of limited monetary resources to nutritious food consumption is secondary to the addictive alcohol and gambling among adults and to soft drinks and sweets among children. There is no indication of nutrition or health considerations being considered at all important. Sharing is still important in food distribution practices, but has been modified by the introduction of appliances that enable preservation and by the ability to purchase goods for immediate needs.

### 5.3 HOUSING AND HOUSEHOLD GOODS

While there is significant variation in housing standards, the most obvious problem is the severe shortage and consequent overcrowding. The houses in Lombadina are well maintained and reflect the additional income from the CDEP scheme.<sup>2</sup> Jean, one of the oldest Aboriginal women residents shows considerable pride in her well maintained house with its neat flower garden. In addition to the fridge and stove that all Lombadina houses seem to contain, Jean has a dining room table and chairs, a television, sewing machine, electric fan and microwave oven that her children had given her as a gift. Also on display is a series of collectables and religious icons. Two other homes, occupied by her elderly women friends, are similarly furnished, as is the home of the community chairman. In Djarindjin some houses are well maintained but the majority are neglected, with household rubbish and car bodies strewn around their surrounds.



The Kalumburu housing is a distinct contrast to the neat and well maintained mission. The thirty one community houses, catering to three hundred people from ten family groups, had been built over a twenty year period. The tin structures built in the 1960s are in an advanced state of disrepair, with the 1970s structures faring little better. Three of the newer houses are used by non-Aboriginal administrators. Overcrowding is severe and furnishings limited; sleeping arrangements leave little space for other things. There is little opportunity to observe the insides and a reluctance to allow strangers to view them. The council administrator said that the majority of residents are ashamed of the accommodation and living conditions. Those houses into which I did manage to glimpse are sparsely furnished, with usually a television, fridge and washing machine, and mattresses or bagging on the floor for sleeping. The outside of the houses is strewn with household rubbish, as are the streets and roads leading out of the town. I was informed that pigs are being raised inside two of the homes.

At Wadeye, the majority of houses lack glass, the windows having wooden or steel shutters. Most doors are constantly open. Furniture is confined to the three essentials noted at Kalumburu, as are sleeping materials. Again, household rubbish is as ubiquitous as the roaming dogs. Just as in the other communities, there is no individual home ownership. The community own all houses, set rental levels and decide on the maintenance schedule and the allocation of new homes.

Some non-Aboriginal administrators are derisive of the low standards of pride and hygiene, blaming this on the sharing ethos and lack of desire for private ownership. Father Leary, from the Wadeye mission, however, gave another interpretation of Aboriginal attitudes toward housing. He is convinced that, for almost all Aborigines, the house is just a camp placed inside four walls. He recounted his experience with the first mission built home some thirty years before:

*I remember the first house we built under the hill there years ago. Three bedroom house and I think we put an electric stove and things, you know. The second or third night I heard yelling and going on. This was before alcohol. I went down there and there was a big common room, few bedrooms off it, but there must have been thirty people there, singing and some didgeridoos going, some sticks. Little kid piddled in the corner. There's water and some bread floating around and I thought "Oh good gracious. Our pride and joy this new house." So I went back, and I was depressed and I started to think, I said, "Well Leary. What value system are you looking at it with." And I thought of dear Mum, and a couple of sisters, saying "Now don't put that there, put it away!" And everything nice and clean. Cause the next one was, "What system are they working out of?" And it hit me like a sledge hammer. It's good to be together, that communal, community thing. And the third one was, "Well which is the better system."*

It has been consistently argued that cultural requirements have not been considered when designing accommodation for Kimberley Aboriginal communities (Ross, 1986). At Kalumburu, those fortunate enough to be allocated a new house are shown a limited number of designs to choose from. The only other choice they are given is for the colour scheme.

At Kalumburu, the mission administrator told of four houses where the phone had been disconnected by Telecom because of excessive unpaid phone bills. This was due partly to long distance calls being made to families, but also through reverse charge calls being accepted from family who did not own phones. Others had been visited by professional bill collectors for overdue rental payments accumulated in the nearby town of Derby. Members of the family had gone to Derby, rented a house, and then returned without notification. According to the mission administrator, they figured that they were not using the house so should not need to pay.

The mission sisters at Wadeye explained that the sharing ethos and lack of desire for individual possessions results in a vicious circle that prevents those who want to maintain their household goods from doing so. She explained:

*And that's why people who try to get ahead can't. People have bought different things, but they can't keep them. Someone comes in and takes it. But those people would like to have like a washing machine and a stove and well they manage, some of them manage to keep their videos and their TV sets so I suppose they look after it... And a woman with a new washing machine said, "All people can use my washing machine and people keep breaking it." So it's gonna go four times as quickly. And no one can do anything about that. They can't stop it. So it's really very difficult for those who want to get ahead and want to have things nice and want to get a few things.*

And it's not just the taking and misuse of the household goods that causes the problem. In other cases, extended family take advantage of the contents. A second sister confirmed these activities:

*But because they all want to share it, a lot of them they just give up and say "What's the good? What's the good of having a refrigerator? It doesn't keep anything. You put something in the refrigerator, somebody comes along and takes it out. So what advantage is a refrigerator." So they've got to battle against that at the moment. And I think that comes with this idea of sharing. One man went so far as to throw his refrigerator in the dump because the drunks would come home and they would open it and take everything. And he wasn't a drinker. So why should he share?*

The stealing of food from fridges was also given as a reason for fighting within families at Djarindjin. Two fridges with chains on the doors observed in Kalumburu confirmed this problem. Alexander, another non-Aboriginal male, who has lived in Wadeye for seventeen years and is married to a local Aboriginal woman, also regards the sharing ethos as a problem when it comes to household goods. Combined with a lack of discipline among children, he argued, traditional sharing rules cause problems when applied to non-traditional goods:

*Trouble is you can't apply traditional rules to non traditional objects. This is where the problem is. And people in the city, coloured people who talk as if they're Aborigines, but they don't really know what or how life really is in a traditional sort of setting. Big problem, because people like to have a boat or a car and a lot of them get them. Trouble is they don't say no to the kids. Kids climb all over them pull everything out and before you know it they're broken. There's one down the road here it's not even two years old it looks like it's twenty years old. It's a wreck. It lasted about fifty five weeks.*

At Kalumburu, the large number of relatively new but discarded washing machines and fridges, which serve as markers on the road to the beach, are testimony to the rapid destruction of household goods in this community. The mission administrator assists pensioners to acquire these larger ticket items through forced savings from their welfare payments, including a credit facility once they have saved fifty percent of the price. According to store records, there is a substantial backlog of families waiting for new washing machines.

The lack of hygiene standards observed in Kalumburu is partly due to living conditions. When twenty people share a house there is an understandable reluctance to take responsibility for cleaning. Severe overcrowding at Kalumburu is worsened during the wet season when water levels cause sewerage systems to overflow.

Mission workers at Kalumburu blame a lack of home training as the reason for poor hygiene standards, saying that in the mission control days girls were strictly educated in cleanliness and hygiene practices. Jean, the older Aboriginal women at Lombadina supported this thinking, arguing that they were not only prepared for housework to care for their own families properly but also to gain a job in the workforce. Jean recounted:

*First thing we did after we said our morning prayers, go out and milk, come back, get washed, go to church, go to mass. After mass straight out to breakfast and then come back and start the morning chores. We used to do a lot of separating milk, we made our own butter from goat's milk. Two girls would go down the dining room help with the baking and setting up down there, and those things rotated for a month or two months and we would change places and that's how we learned how to work and iron and wash. Girls used to do all the washing. For the church, for all us girls and boys and any other washing, particular the dining room and anything like that. We had a great big cast iron copper. We had to boil everything. That was, you know it was hygiene. It was really clean. When we were on the mission the sisters used to always tell us to prepare for life like outside the mission. If you marry outside make sure you got a washing tub, you know, a tub to wash your clothes in. Make sure you got a sewing machine or needle and cotton in your home, cotton and candles, you know those kind of things, and more household things, so they would prepare us for that.*

However, Father Leary once again had a different interpretation, arguing that attitudes depend upon the Aboriginal concept of a house. He recounted how even the women working at the hospital in Wadeye, who were taught strict hygiene practices by the nurses, do not use them in their own homes. Hunter (1993) argued that Aboriginal children reared in environments such as Kalumburu are further disadvantaged when they attempt to enter mainstream society, not only because of their underdeveloped education, but also because of a deprivation in those experiences valued within the society they are attempting to access.

Housing and household goods are not regarded by the Aborigines in these three remote communities as status items, or as means of envy provocation, compared with most non-Aboriginal societies. While desires for home ownership and household goods are expressed, they are regarded as functional and their meanings are prescribed by Aboriginal culture.

## 5.4 FASHION AND PERSONAL POSSESSIONS

As discussed in chapter two, fashion was a key element in the development of consumer culture in Europe (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb 1983; Campbell 1987; McCracken 1988). Emulation, envy provocation and status enhancement through clothing, housing and personal possessions were central issues. So to what extent are fashion, emulation, envy provocation, and status enhancement visible within the Aboriginal communities studied?

It must be remembered that clothing is a relatively new item in these communities, having been introduced during the lifetime of some residents. One of the mission sisters at Kalumburu is in her late seventies and has been in the community for more than fifty years. She delights in recounting the changes she has seen. On clothing she stated: "They used to come out of the bush for bubble bubble<sup>3</sup> and peanuts. Wearing no clothes. And we would feed them." This was confirmed through photographs displayed in the mission museum. One depicted a ceremony in the mission gardens during the 1930s, with a naval officer in white uniform, a monk in full costume, and standing between them a fully naked Aboriginal male holding a spear. At Wadeye, two sisters who had been at the mission during the late 1940s and then returned during the 1970s, recounted stories of clothing the Aborigines who had come out of the bush to the mission and how this had changed:

*They were given a ration of blankets and what we called calico, it wasn't like made clothing. Now in between the late forties and the seventies, they'd changed to the extent that they were all clothed. They were wearing clothes. So in that time they'd changed from that strip of calico. I mean, to wearing clothes. And fashion came in.*

In each of the communities studied, European style clothing is worn. This is purchased from the community general stores and clothing shops, or during visits to the larger centres, particularly Broome, Kununurra and Darwin. While none of the communities display the diversity of fashion evident in Australian cities, fashion systems are evident in the purchase and use of clothing, the type of hairstyles and with individual possessions. There are also marked differences in fashion between the communities.

Clothing styles in general comprise lightweight cotton tops and skirts or dresses for women, jeans or shorts for men, and T-shirts and shorts for those children who do not walk around naked. Although thongs are worn by women, sneakers by teenagers and boots by males, bare feet seems the preferred option of most Aborigines in these communities.

Most Kalumburu women wear skirts and tops that are not tucked in. I saw none wearing jeans, shorts or hats during my stay, even on Sunday at the beach. Dresses are worn for the church service, however. Teenage girls seem to prefer long cotton shorts, whereas younger girls wear T-shirts and shorts and are often difficult to distinguish from the younger boys. The storekeeper noted that new dresses sell very quickly upon arrival. If too many dresses are ordered, those that do not sell immediately are regarded as 'old stock' and out of fashion. They remain unsold despite price reductions. She added: "They do not like to buy cheap clothes, and prefer the types they see on television". A sister from the mission also told of how they stocked second hand clothes for a while, but nobody bought them. She recounted how a maternity dress had been offered to a woman in the late stages of pregnancy but she had replied: "No. That style from sixties. I want style of today". Although a small amount of jewellery is on sale at the store, I observed only two females wearing jewellery, one teenage girl wearing gold stud earrings and another a beaded bracelet and matching ankle strap.

There were also a number of fads that came and went during my stay. A female team member wore a waist bag and within two days the store had sold their entire stock as young girls apparently emulated the fashion. Likewise toy cap guns suddenly appeared among the younger boys, lasting two days until the store ran out of caps. Primary school boys emulated the fashion among young men of tying fish net bands around their heads. Again the fad stopped after two days. When asked about these fads, the storekeeper added that grapes and sweet potatoes had also become fads. She does not like fads because people become annoyed when the store cannot keep up with demand. They are then left with unwanted stock as soon as the craze is over.

The Djarindjin community has similar clothing fashions but primary school boys are likely to wear basketball shirts, emulating what they see on television. Basketball is a popular pastime and most children enjoy watching American NBA games and know the names of the star players. Sharing clothing is common, countering status and envy provocation through possessions. One of the primary school teachers noted that expensive new sneakers are often left lying around. She also spoke about children sharing clothes:

*They might not always be their own, they share clothes you know. You will see one T-shirt doing the rounds, because that's the way things happen. They just share hats and clothes and shoes, whatever. There are certain status things. I mean if you wear a good shirt, people think, cool! In the city the competition over what they wear is just terrible. They don't get into that here. They don't really care. That's not a peer pressure thing. They don't get hassled about that.*

Another of the teachers commented that there is a pressure among teenagers not to stand out through clothing or individual possessions, especially when they make a statement about attendance at public event such as discos. She commented:



*They just don't want other people to know that they're making the effort. They don't really dress up because then it would seem like they made an effort. And if they make an effort it means they care about it, you know, and they're not supposed to care about it. It's not cool to care.*

Envy provocation was also described as something to be avoided at all costs. Kevin, a twenty year old non-Aboriginal male worker at Lombadina, told of a young Aboriginal male purchasing a nice looking car for his seventeenth birthday, after earning good money working on a farm. He said:

*It wasn't long before his cousins, a couple of his cousins, threw rocks through the window and smashed the lights and smashed the door because he was acting flash in his car and as far as they were concerned he was showing off which is not him. He is just a really nice young man who wanted to have this thing. It was the thing to do to have a good fast car so that certainly happens. He was seen to be showing off, being better than anyone else. Everyone shares because it brings everyone down to the same level. You have got something you have it until it is gone and you are all the same.*

At Wadeye there is a specialist clothing store attached to the council supermarket and a second, selling womens' and children's clothing only, operated by the mission. Stealing levels are high at the council store but not from the mission store. The women running the store commented that both men and women are fashion conscious, spend considerable time making choices, and will not buy if they cannot get what they want. When she had tried to help out by recycling clothes from Darwin, this had failed because most would not buy anything second hand. The store also stocked belts, rings and bangles, which are popular with the younger children.

During the daily sessions at the community social club, the older married women wear cotton dresses, while the men wear shorts or jeans. Among teenage girls the fashion appears to be black bras visible through light cotton tops. Large

numbers of Aborigines of all ages wear Australian Football League jumpers and the reasons for this will be discussed in the following section.

When asked if fashion was important to the younger Wadeye males, Steven, a twenty year old Aboriginal male, replied strongly in the affirmative, adding that they are distinctive compared to other communities. He compared Wadeye fashion to the Tiwi style:

*See over on the islands, I spend some time there at Xmas times, they are pretty good over there. Like they are tidy sort of thing. They have short hair, they are sort of pretty boy image over there on the island. But you come here and its the heavy metal sort of image. You will see around all the cut jeans and the chains, and ear rings they have probably given to themselves. Long hair, pretty rough and ready sort of look. More torn jackets and things. Clothes, they almost wear them until they drop sort of thing. They won't have a wardrobe. Well, some of them might. A lot of them wont have too much. It's limited to what they can wear sort of thing.*

The sharing of clothing is also practiced among the teenagers and young males at Wadeye. The fifty year old sister at the clothing store commented, "You call it sharing. To me it's a kind of investment. I share, but I know I'm going to get something back." Steven was more explicit:

*It's not really gifts. Its like, "Can I have that shirt?" "Oh yeah I s'pose!" Its like a hand me down sort of thing. It goes both ways. It's almost like a bargaining. "I'll give you this jacket if you give me that big ring." And the bigger the ring the harder you can hit in a fight sort of thing.*

The personal items, such as jewellery, boom boxes, walkmans, and electric guitars stocked by the store, suggest that individual items are more common than at any of the other communities and popular among the young males. This was also confirmed by Steven:

*Cassettes are also a big thing. Listening to your walkman sort of thing. They can take them anywhere. Your out bush and along comes this big stereo set, it's hard to get away from it.*

It is obvious that fashion is an integral part of the consumption patterns associated with clothing and other goods used for personal use in each of the communities studied, and that it differs both within and between communities. The emulation, which was so important to the development of European consumer cultures, is also evident, being transmitted through television, from role models, and as a trickle down effect from older groups. Status enhancement and envy provocation through possessions, however, does not appear to be significant, being countered through the ethos of sharing and the lack of peer pressure to conform. The observations and informant statements suggest that the evolving consumer culture in these Aboriginal communities is not reliant upon the same factors as those described earlier in the development of European consumer cultures.

## 5.5 LEISURE AND TELEVISION

Although the mission tried to stop the speaking of Bardi and the presence of indigenous religious practices, both are maintained by the older people. The missions did allow children to continue fishing and games related to the sea, however, and one of the older Aboriginal women recalled these activities:

*When the sisters used to take us up for Sunday afternoon and we'd go out in rafts and the poor things would walk along the beach calling "Come back, come back." They were scared. And they had on their veil and habit, shoes and we'd go, "We'll see you afterwards, we'll come back sister." And then we would row around the bay there and we would come back. They were frightened. They thought the boat would tip over or something, but we knew. Our grandfathers and our grandmothers would sit on the rafts. It was just a flat thing. If you fell off you could jump back on again. Yes, swimming was one of the plays that we used to do all the time. We used to go down the flat here and the tide used to come in*

*around twelve o'clock! Lunch hour. We would come back when the school bell rang. Come in half wet and go into class.*

A number of the older informants claimed that these games were related to survival skills. Father Leary, from the mission at Wadeye, spoke of the incredible bush skills possessed by the young children when he first arrived some forty years ago:

*And I remember once I was taking the kids out near to the beach out here and it's bit soft in there and there's foot marks all over it. Thousands of people hunting there over the years and over the last few months and we were half way across this and all the kids were singing and there are about forty on the back and suddenly, "Stop!" And I said, "Hello someone's fallen off." So I stopped and I said, "What's wrong?" And they said, "Strangers tracks." Well tracks everywhere and a couple jumped up and they were following these tracks so I said, "Come on we're going." We got to the beach and they all huddled round me, I said, "Aren't you going hunting?" "Oh no! We're too frightened. There's a stranger somewhere." I said "Go and get some crabs then I'll take you back." "No we can't." So I took them all back and as we passed the camp they yelled out that there were strange tracks out there and within a couple of minutes there were about eight blokes with spears heading out that way and apparently they tracked this fella right down to the Fitzmaurice River.*

Most of these, said Father Leary, have now been lost, a belief confirmed by a number of the older Aborigines. While there are attempts at the revitalisation of cultural activities and practices, including languages, older informants claim that young children are not interested in learning these skills, preferring videos and cassette players instead.

One activity that is popular among a significant group in each community is the mission church service. What has occurred, at Wadeye in particular, is a syncretisation of Christian and cultural traditions as the Aboriginal ritual activities, once refuted as evil by the church, are combined with Christian traditions. Circumcision, initiation rituals and funeral services are examples of this. The

church at Wadeye illustrates this syncretisation with its altar draped with a cloth embroidered with four turtles, two snakes and two emus. The walls behind the altar are painted in the local dot designs, with animal motifs surrounding a photograph of Pope John Paul II. Father Leary also told of Catholic traditions being incorporated into traditional ceremonies conducted in the bush. He described a circumcision ceremony where a trench was dug to symbolise the Christian return to the grave and, then, the young men were "stripped naked, covered in blood from head to foot, face down in the trench. It's a real symbolic dying in the womb of the earth."

Activities related to the sea still play a significant role in daily leisure time among Djarindjin children. However, basketball has become a significant game, especially among teenagers after the introduction of television and the broadcast of American games. A community trampoline outside the Djarindjin store is popular among younger children as is Holey-Holey,<sup>4</sup> a gambling game not unlike marbles. Young children also display their skills at spear throwing, which they put into practice on the reefs.

At Kalumburu, there is little indication of children's games being played in the streets, with the basketball court in disrepair and used only for social gatherings. Younger children play Holey-Holey while waiting for their parents outside the card game. At Wadeye, football is played in preference to basketball and younger children play a local game involving one child rolling a plastic flour tin lid along the road while others knock it over with stones.

In each of the communities, the most widely owned commodity is a television set, often with a VCR attached. Like most Australian rural areas, the variety of broadcasts available is limited, although the Australian Football League games are extremely popular and males and females are aware of the names of players in many teams. In Lombadina and Djarindjin, the Perth based West Coast Eagles team are especially popular as an Aboriginal player, Chris Lewis, had visited the area with

another of the Eagles stars. We were invited to join one family in Djarindjin to watch the West Coast Eagles play. The number watching grew rapidly and there was plenty of excitement and emotion shown especially when the Eagles lost in a very close finish.

Australian Rules Football is not widely played in the northern areas of Australia because of the debilitating heat. In Kalumburu there is little evidence of support for the game. At Wadeye, however, there is considerable support for the game and the community is large enough to support three local teams in a regional competition, which includes teams from nearby Aboriginal communities. The football oval has the town's only commercial advertising, the Darwin beer producer of 'Red Roo' sponsoring the scoreboard. Local team symbols and colours are copied from the national competition and many young boys and adult men and women wear national football team jumpers. The three most popular are: Hawthorn, probably because they were the most successful team of the eighties; Adelaide, because their colours match the Aboriginal flag; and Essendon, because their colours match those of the local red-tailed black cockatoo. Teams such as Collingwood are favoured because their symbol 'the magpie' is a common local bird, while others are favoured because they have Aboriginal players. In one house the only two pieces of furniture are a television set and a refrigerator decorated with a large poster of Carlton star Greg Williams. Strung at the top of a twenty foot tree in front of a house in the main street is a handmade Hawthorn banner bearing the number nineteen, while the post office is emblazoned with the slogan, "Ben Allen 15 Champion".<sup>5</sup>

It is not uncommon for males to adopt the names of national players and a number unashamedly introduced themselves using these assumed names. These observations suggest that there is a large degree of syncretisation between symbols from the national football competition and Wadeye totemic symbols. In the best known analysis of totemism, Levi Strauss (1964) argued that totemism occurred

when natural objects were adopted to symbolically represent social groups. Applying this concept to modern societies, Sahlins (1976) argued that manufactured material objects had been substituted for natural objects. It seems reasonable to propose that Aborigines at Wadeye have replaced traditional totems with those supplied through television.

There are sufficient VCR players to support video rental facilities in each of the communities. In many cases the VCR is shared among a large extended family and moves between houses upon demand. Lance, the twenty year old son of the previous headmaster at Wadeye, grew up in the community and speaks fluent Murinpattah. He was on holiday with friends made while at school in Wadeye. He commented:

*There would be at least one in each family unit. Like in the extended family. A few would have TV but maybe they would share a VCR. It would get passed around the family whenever they got a video to watch or whatever.*

Teachers complain of a lack of parental care or control over the programs watched by children and recount stories of young primary children talking quite happily about violent scenes from videos. This is hardly surprising, however, given the large numbers of children in each house. Store managers indicate that the most popular rental videos are action and adult films featuring nudity. The most popular titles during my stay there included Terminator II, Hellraiser III, Hell on Earth, Rocky V, Hunt for Red October, The Horny Housewife and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

As previously discussed, watching the same video show does not necessarily result in the same interpretation of meanings across cultures. This conclusion was also reached during observations within Aboriginal communities in Australia (Michaels 1988). Angela, a thirty five year old non-Aboriginal school teacher in

Djarindjin, made similar comments when describing the television viewing habits of her young students:

*They love it. I would say that they miss out on a lot of the meaning of some of it. Like the action they catch up on, but a lot of the meaning, especially when you, like humour and when you make little comments or sarcastic comments or something like. I think that just goes straight over their heads. The humour and that but they see action, you know if someone falls off their chair in the movie or something it is really funny, yeah they can catch that but when it comes to the language.*

While children do not necessarily understand the influence of television on their choices and attitudes, storekeepers speak of the increased desire for consumer goods such as soft drinks, branded sneakers and basketball shirts that they believe can be attributed to television. At the church service I attended during the first visit to Lombadina, the sermon was directed at reducing desires for goods seen on television. A sermon at Wadeye, however, encouraged the kind of 'sharing that Aborigines do', suggesting that if you do this God will take special care of you.

A number of informants claimed that television, VCRs and video games occupy a significant proportion of children's leisure time, with a resulting reduction in time spent on outside activities. Among adult males, however, significant time is devoted to alcohol consumption, or recovery from its aftermath, while gambling is the most frequent pastime among women.

Unlike mainstream Australian society, where the time devoted to leisure and work pursuits is more clearly defined, the distinction is blurred in these Aboriginal communities. However, one thing in common is the status ascribed to sporting teams and sporting stars in these Aboriginal communities with special status granted to Aboriginal footballers and black American basketball stars. Television is the most widely owned consumer good in each of the communities, while VCRs and videos are widely shared.



One of the most important non-traditional consumer goods adopted by the Aboriginal communities is the motor vehicle, particularly the four-wheel-drive, with each of the three community councils owning at least one. Such vehicles are important in reinforcing traditional practices, making it easier and quicker to access distant relatives or tribal lands. Due to the high levels of poverty, there is little private ownership, although cheap large cars are popular among the young males at Wadeye. One group of six males at Wadeye purchased a car on the day that we met them. The car, a 1970s model Chrysler sedan, purchased for \$600 in Darwin was described as a 'good car' because it had a large reliable engine. Its main function is to transport the six men to music gigs where one of the friends plays in a band. It is also used to reach nearby communities that do not have restrictions on alcohol purchases. The car exemplifies the attitude of convenience rather than pride and, like so many others in the community, the following day the windows were broken.

A substantial car graveyard at Wadeye bears silent testimony to the lack of emotion shown when possessions no longer function and are discarded. This is no different to other personal possessions and, rather than Sahlins' (1964) original 'affluent society', current attitudes toward possessions can perhaps more accurately be expressed as the 'effluent society'.

There is, however, a desire to own a vehicle for the functional purposes that it serves. The most successful of the Kalumburu artists has revenues retained by the Waringarri Arts Corporation and is excited about the new four-wheel-drive that he is to take possession of within the month. Vehicle ownership, however, carries with it the responsibility to transport others should a need arise. This includes attending funerals, collecting alcohol from outside the community, reaching outstations, and attending bush week or fishing weekends. Failure to share with others in times of personal need may cause bitter arguments and even fighting, as I

witnessed on two occasions. Sharing of cars also ensures that status enhancement and envy provocation cannot develop, as the example on the 'flash car' in the previous section illustrated.

It is perhaps meaningless to consider leisure activities in societies where the need to perform tasks to ensure survival no longer exists, where meaningful work does not exist for the majority, and where leisure time itself has become a hollow effort to pass the time. Hunting and fishing, once considered work tasks for survival, have now become leisure pursuits, while traditional leisure activities have been superseded by American Basketball, Australian Rules Football and television viewing. The motor vehicle and motor boat have become almost essential leisure activity accoutrements yet, at the same time, they also support traditional practices. While television has impacted more on children than adults, it has possibly resulted in a new syncretised totemic system based upon national football teams.

## Endnotes

1. Figures were supplied by a member of the research team who worked at the Aboriginal Economic Development Office. He had installed a computer system at the One Arm Point community store and was assisting with the installation of a similar system at Kalumburu.
2. The CDEP scheme was designed to enable Aboriginal communities to initiate their own economic development by creating jobs that provide work skills for payment. It has been criticised for not being able to create meaningful jobs or training in isolated communities.
3. Bubble-bubble is a mixture of soaked bread and crushed peanuts.
4. *Holey-Holey* is a children's game, similar to pitch and toss, and involves the manoeuvring of coins into a hole made in the dirt.
5. The number 15 Hawthorn jumper is worn by the team captain Ben Allen.

## CHAPTER SIX

### GAMBLING AND ALCOHOL

*Here I live in this tin shack  
Nothing here worth coming back  
To drunken fights and awful sights  
People drunk most every night.  
We've nothing old, and nothing new  
want us all to be like you,  
We've no future we have no past  
Hope the sun will shine at last.  
On the way to a Bran Nue Dae  
(Chi 1991)*

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The two consumption activities that create the greatest social problems in the three communities studied, and indeed for the Australian Aboriginal population in general, are alcohol and gambling. Neither were practiced in traditional Aboriginal society and both are addictive behaviours. Their impact on consumption practices and social life are so dramatic that they have been treated separately from other consumption practices .

## 6.2 GAMBLING AND ALCOHOL

Gambling is a common Australian leisure time activity which, despite its profound negative impacts, is generally accepted as a legitimate activity by Australian society at large. While evidence suggests that it is those who can least afford to gamble who suffer most from its ramifications, it is the remote Aboriginal communities of Australia that experience the most disastrous social impacts. Card playing is the universal form of gambling in these communities, perhaps because lower levels of literacy does not represent an obstacle to success. However, the action is fast, high levels of concentration are required and the speed of mathematical skills is quite remarkable. Once gambling commences, children's pleas for attention and food are largely ignored. Little wonder that gambling is described as a major contributor to child neglect and malnutrition in the Kimberley Aboriginal communities (Hunter and Spargo 1988).

On the other hand, the winning of money is not necessarily the most important aspect of gambling and the positive aspects are often overlooked. Card games, and indeed the drinking of alcohol among friends, also provides a forum for social interaction and a means of relieving boredom among people who have significant amounts of leisure time due to the lack of employment. During field work in the Lombardina community some twenty years earlier one researcher noted:

*...card schools substitute a forum for interaction between people and groups where traditional ceremonial activities have been abandoned, or receive less emphasis in the camp situations of towns and missions. To treat card playing as 'gambling' is to introduce an immediate bias in its description and there is a strong possibility that its positive role in interpersonal relations will be underplayed (Robinson 1973, p. 209).*

In Lombadina, gambling is now banned by the community council, although there is no restriction on residents joining card games in the adjoining community of Djarindjin. I was told that card games had been strongly discouraged during mission times, but have flourished in Djarindjin since then and games operate daily. One house is nicknamed 'the casino' by the people of Lombadina. The players have no objection to outsiders watching the game, which invariably takes place in the front yard or on the front verandah, and I sat with the players in one game for about an hour.

There are no restrictions on who can join the game provided they have cash. Four Aboriginal women and two Aboriginal men were playing as I arrived and one of the younger male players invited me to join with a warning that I would almost certainly lose my money. In the hour that I observed the game one male left and two females joined in. Jimmy, a non-Aboriginal male mechanic who finished his day's work in the community workshop, joined the game as I was leaving. There was no alcohol present but five pre-teenage children lurked on the edges at various times, requesting money when they observed their parents winning. On receiving funds, the children scurried immediately to the nearby shop and returned soon after with their normal fare of meat pies, sweets and soft drinks. On no occasion did I notice any of these children ask for a second handout during the game. There was considerable concentration throughout each game and social chatter between the players only takes place between games. A number of onlookers arrived and observed in silence before leaving a few minutes later. Jean, one of the older Aboriginal women at Lombadina is critical of the way Djarindjin women spend money on gambling. She comments:

*Today they have no money from pay day to pay day. They have none. It comes in and goes. The gambling is very bad. They even travel to One Arm Point for it. If she wins she might buy a few things. If she's a drinker she*

*would buy more drinks and if she is a smoker, cigarettes or gunja, and someone around here was saying that they will pay fifty dollars for a little rolly. Then they save up some money to go back to gambling again.*

At Kalumburu, the gambling structure is quite different. A large open hall, adjacent to the defunct basketball court, the mission, and the community store, serves as the gambling centre. The hall has a bitumen floor and wire surround rather than solid walls, so that all activity is visible from the street. The structure is fitted with electric lighting wired from the street lighting system and most games continued until at least nine at night during the time I was in the community. On two occasions the action consisted of almost the entire adult population, with small circles of around eight players and little unutilised space. Players occasionally leave one circle at the end of a game and join another. Again, there are no restrictions on who can play. Children also frequent the fringes and claim a share of winnings as in Djarindjin. Unlike Djarindjin, however, I was not welcome in the hall during gambling sessions and my observations were met with discouraging glances.

As in all three communities, the consequences of gambling affect the entire community. Because of the high food prices already described, there is little between subsistence and malnutrition. The Kalumburu mission informants also told of electricity services being removed through non-payment of bills. There are consistent losers identified within the community, their children consequently the most neglected when funds are diverted from sustenance. The entire community suffers when winnings are dispersed externally. Informants told of large winners flying to Darwin on drinking binges, returning broke a week or two later, sometimes with gifts of clothing, household appliances and toys. These stories were confirmed by the pilot who flew us back to Kununurra. He added that most spend the extra fare to reach Darwin where they are less likely to be helped by friends in spending their winnings and where goods are cheaper.

Informants at the mission told me of outsiders flying in from other communities and leaving with large winnings. They are attracted because alcohol is banned in the community and consequently additional funds are available. The informants describe locals as poor players compared to the outsiders, with 'bad luck' being the usual excuse to explain their losses. Robinson (1973) writes of 'luck' being attributed by the Bardi gamblers to the spirit world, with traditional magical<sup>2</sup> practices being employed, although this was not mentioned by any informants.

There is also a strong element of socialising with the games in all communities. Invariably there is a similar structure to the groups playing each day. This is explained further by Robinson (1973, p. 209) who argues that card games are not just about the winning and losing of money or material possessions but also a social activity, providing interaction between people and groups where traditional ceremonial activities have been abandoned. Mission informants describe gambling as the most destructive of all pastimes, not only re-allocating resources from sustenance and contributing to child neglect, but, paradoxically, destroying community involvement in traditional activities. Father Leary describes both sides of gambling at Wadeye:

*Not that I am anti-gambling because in some ways it's social. They sit around and tell stories and laugh, but it is becoming serious because they lose everything they've got. So if the kids get hungry they're not supplied with food. They are abused. The same with alcohol.*

With strong values of sharing and reciprocity, gamblers are encouraged to continue for the big win rather than share smaller winnings with others. In addition, the level of poverty means the purchase of 'luxury' items is essentially impossible, unless a large win is forthcoming at cards. The prospect of such wins is a greater motivator than fear of loss, as there is always the sharing ethos to ensure minimal

subsistence. Such minimum levels of sustenance, however, do not adequately support satisfactory health standards. It is no coincidence that Kalumburu has the most widespread and entrenched gambling problem and the worst health record of the communities studied.

Alcohol has been central to Aboriginal-European inter-cultural relations ever since occupation and it continues to be so. It has come to signify more than just a European commodity; its use by Aborigines symbolically represents acceptance, inclusion and citizenship rights for these Aborigines. For Europeans, it symbolises lack of control, violent behaviour and Aboriginal untrustworthiness. When colonial governments prohibited the sale of alcohol to Aborigines on the grounds of 'protecting their interests', it became the central issue in Aboriginal-police relations. This is still the case today, despite the abolition of the government's prohibition policy. Police arrest Aborigines at forty times the rate of non-Aborigines and detain them at twenty times the rate, while almost half of the Aboriginal males in the Kimberley have been in prison and most can anticipate incarceration at some time in their life, especially for an alcohol-related incident (Hunter 1993).

Contrary to the common stereotype of the drunken Aboriginal man among mainstream Australian society (Fiske, Hodge, and Turner 1987; Langton 1993), figures show that the Kimberley Aborigines have a higher percentage of non-drinkers (24 percent among males and 54 percent among females) than the wider Australian population and have a significantly higher proportion of reformed drinkers than the non-Aboriginal population of the Kimberleys (Alexander 1990). Part of the explanation for this 'drunken man' stereotype is the greater visibility of Aboriginal drinking in public open spaces compared to non-Aborigines who indulge within the privacy of houses or the sanctity of the 'pub'. This explanation is supported by Terry, a fifty year old Aboriginal male who was educated at the Lombadina mission, joined a cattle station and learnt the skills needed to become a



ringer. After several periods in prison for alcohol related crimes, he reformed and now leads the anti-alcohol program in Kununurra. He speaks of the difference between 'whitefellas' and Aborigines and the unfortunate reputation that his people have earned:

*The main fact is for the gudija people, or non-Aboriginal people, they're hidin'. Yeah they hide and drink. The whitefellas are just as bad with drinkin' but you don't see them, they drink at home and in the pubs. Our mob drink in the open. So everyone says, "Look at them blokes, got no bloody control see."*

He then comments on how the 'drunken' stereotype developed:

*We got tourists comin' in, pull up for one day and see two or three Aborigine people fall arse over head and they're drunk. And they go to the next town and they say Aborigines is a bunch of drunks.*

He denounces this drinking behaviour, however, and relates how it degrades his people and gives a poor impression to others:

*Everybody don't like to see the rubbish outside the Hotel there, left in the morning after a night drinking. They don't like to see the rubbish at White Gum Park there. They don't like to see some drunken person walking in the shop and making a fool of themselves. So they don't like these problems happening but no one don't want to do anything about it. So this is what, we're trying to do. Something about it.*

Notwithstanding, figures also indicate that an estimated 85 percent of the Aborigines who do drink have an alcohol problem (Hunter, Hall, and Spargo 1992), with one survey showing the median consumption rate per drinking day for young males being 169 grams (equivalent to eleven cans of full strength beer) and 88 grams for young women (Hunter 1993).

Prior studies have suggested that alcohol abuse by Aborigines is a colonial legacy (Berndt and Berndt 1992). Alcohol was a prominent part of frontier life, with its isolation and social pressure to consume, and indeed it continues to be excessive in contemporary outback Australia. Langton (1993) argued that alcohol was intentionally used to "tame" the Aborigine, while Marshall (1983) proposed that Aboriginal drinking habits, especially the loss of inhibitions and alcohol associated violence, were learned from observing colonials.

The prohibition period encouraged secretive binge drinking. Further social disruption occurred as 'card carrying'<sup>1</sup> mixed descent Aborigines, who were not subject to these restrictions, attained higher status in their communities because of their ability to drink in the 'whitefella's pubs', as well as provide illegal supplies to other Aborigines. The Aboriginal alcohol officer describes how this system operated when he was a ringer:

*So he had the citizen rights but he used to buy grog for all his ringers, you know, all his working men and they sort of drink in the quiet. And they were frightened to drink out in public because they didn't want to get caught probably the bloke who bought the grog he would have been in more serious trouble, you know. Probably the whole lot would have got locked up. All I can say is I think the citizen rights really bugged every body up all the Aboriginal people. You see alcohol was never a problem before citizen rights came out.*

Following the granting of citizenship rights in 1967, the situation changed dramatically and social disruption increased further. The reformed Aboriginal alcoholic ringer explains the difference in contemporary thinking between the younger and older Aborigines:

*Like the young people in our communities, they feel left out a lot, because they feel, or the message they're getting that the old people know everything. The old people usually say to the young fella "You fella no good. When I was young we never used to do them sort of things." But when they was young there was no bloody drinking then see. So they never had no access to alcohol and all this sort of thing. So the young fellas could be doing the same thing if living in the country back then, you know. I suppose myself as well. But we were born in the citizens rights days and everything changed now.*

The problems associated with the upsurge in alcohol use since the nineteen seventies have been attributed to a diversity of causes including; the breakdown of traditional social control mechanisms and expressive outlets; a lack of means for establishing and ritually enacting group identity; non-observance of indigenous rules of behaviour for alcohol consumption, combined with a culturally infused sharing ethos; resistance expressed through non-compliance with the work ethic and the imposed order of the non-Aboriginal world; and a lack of processes for reducing tensions and frustrations occurring due to poverty, unemployment, discrimination, boredom and dislocation (Albrecht 1974; Huffer 1983; Larsen 1980; Sacket 1988). This last reason, in particular, explains the greater incidence of alcohol abuse among males who have lost more status in the change from a tradition oriented to welfare culture.

Informants claim that alcohol offered an opportunity for the release and expression of emotions that are otherwise culturally inappropriate. This is illustrated by comments about drunken bragging, spousal abuse, belligerent talk, and other violence. Kenny, a reforming forty year old Aboriginal male alcoholic recently incarcerated for car theft, explains the tendency of his people toward abusiveness while drinking:

*Well, that's what they mainly do. Drinking more or less gives them courage to say things they won't say when they're sober or do things that they won't do when they're sober. I mean now when you are sober, you ask your wife to do something, and she don't do it, then you think "Okay." But if you are drunk, and you ask your wife to do it and she doesn't, then you just give her your hand, and then if you're the sort of bloke who gets courage out of grog you know, [you] probably take it out of somebody else in the pub or something.*

Tommy, another reformed alcoholic present at the same interview added:

*I see alcohol as something that can bring out an emotion that they don't normally, you will never never see, but being on alcohol they can use that emotion. You are a different person, a lot bigger, a lot whatever, talkative. I know blokes that you won't get three words out of them in a day, but give them a couple of beers, and they've "Been there, done that". It brings out an emotion that they can't, won't normally bring out.*

At the same time, after a drunken binge there is often a suggestion that this 'lack of responsibility' can be explained away because the alcohol was in control. As the two men just quoted above put it:

*Kenny: Its like you can go and stab that bloke, but its all right because you was drunk.*

*Tommy: Naw, not my fault, I was drunk. But if you was sober and done that, its bad.*

With regard to identity, the ringer is the most alluring and enduring role model for Aboriginal males in outback Australia. For many Aborigines, the initial attraction to drinking is related to this glamorous lifestyle in which alcohol is perceived to be an integral part. Once they begin drinking, peer pressure or

'mateship' often reinforces their alcohol consumption behaviours. Terry, the Aboriginal ringer reflects on the original reasons for his own drinking problem:

*Well in the ringing days there is some sort of word out that everyone felt that all the ringers were the tough men. All the tough people. So everytime they come in town they all got on the booze and everyone in town, the people used to work in town, they was all the weak mob. The ringers were all the tough mob. So to be one of them I had to drink with them as well because well otherwise they kept saying that if you don't drink with us your not one of us. You know. So I thought to myself "Why not." So I joined the party. So I drank and I carried on I think the way everyone else did. Like boozing up and fighting and so on. I felt really good the first time I got into a fight and I knocked someone down and I thought I was a big man. Then I thought, the next day, when I got sobered up, I got a lot of booming up from my mates and everyone else said, "You done a good job, you beat that lug." So I felt good inside for some reason, I can't explain to this day as well, you know. Yeah, well, I think it was peer pressure group from this mob I think which made me drink. They never actually grabbed the can of beer or whatever and poured it down my throat. But I wanted to drink too I think.*

And it is not only the role model of ringers that is used as a form of identity. At Wadeye, in particular, there is a strong network of males who associate through drinking, often driving to nearby communities without alcohol restrictions. There is also a strong community division between 'the drinkers' and those who refrain.

The lack of Aboriginal cultural rules relating to inebriation, combined with the culturally infused sharing ethos discussed earlier in this chapter, exacerbate the problem of alcohol consumption. A police officer in a town in close proximity to one of the communities studied, and often frequented by community members, describes the scenario of daily events prior to the introduction of an alcohol

containment policy:

*Half past eight in the morning they would open and the people or the drinkers that we're talking about, drank casks of Coolabah Moselle wine. It's cheap for the volume you get and its 12 per cent alcohol and it does the job more or less. People up here, you have to perhaps understand, that they don't come home at the end of a day after a hard day's work and have a couple of beers. Most of these people don't work or they can't work, there's just no employment for them and its not having a social drink with friends. Its a situation where you buy your grog, you then drink it as quick as you can or someone else will drink it on you. And once you've drunk yours you go and look for someone else who's got some grog if you have no money. And again the problem extends from the cultural situation of the Aboriginal people where whoever had got the meat for the day is obliged to share it with other people who weren't so fortunate. Those days have changed but the culture is still there that if you've got money you're obliged to share it with people. If you're got alcohol you're obliged to share it with everybody, so perhaps you can expect from the personal thing that you know, this is my money I worked for it if you like, I've bought my grog so I know I've got to share it but I'm gonna get my fair go out of it first. At the end of the day people were drunk to the state of just about unconsciousness, by about ten o'clock in the morning.*

The proposal that drinking to excess is a form of resistance, expressed through non-compliance with the work ethic and the imposed order of the non-Aboriginal world, is supported by field observations of the conspicuous litter of beer cans and wine cartons, plus the increased aggressiveness toward non-Aborigines following the consumption of alcohol. It is most conspicuous in the adjoining communities of Lombadina, which controls alcohol usage, and Djarindjin that lacks control over the

consumption of alcohol. A number of the Lombadina residents comment on the lack of work ethic and self-control of Djarindjin residents. Bruce, a non-Aboriginal male married to an Aboriginal woman from Lombadina has worked in both communities. He explains what he believes are the differences:

*Certainly the difference is there and it is not just in their houses, it is the pride in their work, pride in their community in the general sense, and I suppose pride in themselves, in looking after themselves as well. Because the health and well being of the people on this side far exceeds those on the other side. And it's the alcohol you know.*

Albert, a fifty year old Aboriginal man working in Lombadina, explains how his people take a pride in their community:

*They keep everything tidy. You've got the community centre. You've got this church, very clean and everything. Another sports centre they just done up, you know restored. They're more active. Lots of workshops where they do all sorts of things. And they control the alcohol.*

The proposed causes of, and suggested solutions to, the Aboriginal alcohol problem, that has increased dramatically since the lifting of restrictions on the sale of alcohol to Aborigines, fit within three groupings. These are 'lack of self control' and inaction; 'deviant' behaviour requiring incarceration; and 'manifestation of poverty and disadvantage' with a policy of decriminalisation of public intoxication and provision of assistance programs. Overall, the field observations and informant comments support the proposed causes of contemporary alcohol abuse. These include resistance to imposed social norms, a rationale for emotional release, emulation of ringer drinking behaviour, peer pressure and the culturally infused sharing ethos. Excessive drinking does not harm only the drinker, however, and the major problem facing the three communities is not so much the treatment of alcohol abuse as its impact upon the community as a whole.

### 6.3 SOCIAL IMPACTS OF GAMBLING AND ALCOHOL

Berndt and Berndt (1992) suggested that alcohol consumption had become a patterned behaviour linked to positive Aboriginal values, such as social dependency and reciprocity and, as such, was regarded as a desirable and expected way of life. However, few researchers of Aboriginal alcohol consumption would dispute that alcohol has had a damaging impact on tradition oriented lifestyle, family and community structure, and Aboriginal health. It is perhaps the most important single cause of contemporary Aboriginal health problems in the Kimberley. A director of nursing at one of the community health clinics distinguishes between the direct and indirect effects of alcohol among her clinic patients:

*The side of the alcohol problems that we see is normally the effect rather than the causes of the alcoholism and all the rest, most of our work revolves around violence-related trauma, trauma-related violence that comes in. Then there's skin diseases, failing to thrive, small babies. Rather than just the direct effects of alcohol a lot of the problems that we have with the people that come into the hospital are sick from the effects of it, so [it] disrupts your social life. Money that's spent on alcohol is diverted from looking after children, from giving them good food, good shelter, clothing. We get the direct effects as well as the number of alcohol-related diseases that come in here. People come in with alcohol-related diseases or alcohol-related trauma or domestic violence as a result of having drunk lots of alcohol, fighting - things like that. The secondary effects mostly center [on] the secondary related diseases like epilepsy related to alcoholism, or epilepsy as a result of trauma being sparked off by the alcoholic being injured over possessions. A lot of the fights seem to be over small things, such as stealing food.*



While infant mortality has fallen substantially, Aboriginal death rates in the Kimberley are still more than double those of the wider Australian population and life expectancy twenty years lower (Thomson 1991). Even more significant however, the incidence of Aboriginal deaths from external causes has increased significantly since the lifting of restrictions on the sale of alcohol to Aborigines in the Kimberley (Hunter 1993).

A study, conducted nearly twenty years after alcohol prohibition ended, showed that twenty percent of Aboriginal male deaths and thirteen percent of Aboriginal female deaths in the Kimberley were from external causes, rising to a staggering eighty percent among the 15-24 year old age group. Motor vehicle accidents and suicide accounted for more than half of all external deaths, with alcohol being involved in sixty percent of them (Hunter 1993).

Reported Aboriginal suicides in the Kimberley increased from one during the 1960s to three during the 1970s and twenty one during the 1980s. The cause of death is uniformly violent (almost three quarters by hanging) with three quarters of the victims having a history of alcohol abuse and none having any form of earned income at the time of death (Hunter 1993).

While non-Aboriginal informants speak about incidents of suicide in the communities, there is a strong reluctance to discuss any of the details. Among the Aborigines there is a taboo about speaking the name of any deceased person and, consequently, suicide was not discussed with any of the Aboriginal informants.

Traditional initiation is still practiced in one of the communities but is not strictly enforced. Two thirty year old informants told how they had left for the city to avoid initiation, while Grace, the older Aboriginal woman, is saddened that her grandchildren have not been initiated. In Wadeye, initiation is still undertaken by some but under the direction of the hospital and in some cases in conjunction with the mission church. Ritual mutilation, such as tooth evulsion, and subcision, were

culturally sanctioned symbolic practices in traditional Aboriginal life (Favazza 1987) and are also still practiced to some degree in the communities studied. Social change, however, has resulted in new 'rites of passage', with frustration, aggression and alcohol abuse, the basis of contemporary self-mutilation and violence (Wilson 1985). All incidents of family violence observed or described, were male initiated and contained within the community. A ninth grade child in one of the community schools wrote in an essay: "Alcohol makes them go silly and then they go and break into buildings and they flog their wives." This is supported by research in other Aboriginal communities indicating that the major causal factor for alcoholism is the diminution of male power, both economic and sacred (Thomson 1991). Initially, the imposition of European control caused massive disruption to existing male-female power relationships. This was further disrupted by mission policies banning ritual practices and partner choice, both domains of male power (Mol 1982; Burbank 1988). However, the major impact followed the shift to welfare dependency as women gained control of expenditure, and consequently major contemporary power decisions. The reversal of power roles further undermined male self-esteem leading to them adopting alcohol as a perceived means of empowerment (Barber, Punt and Albers 1988). Gale (1978, p. 2) describes the path from hotel to gaol taken by many Aboriginal males as, "an inevitable consequence of their loss of status and purpose in society". This power imbalance is confirmed by Roberta Sykes (1989, p. 16) who notes that:

*White women struggle to reach the place and gain the benefits of the power position of white men. However, I do not know of any Black woman who aspires to be in the place of the Black man.*

It is also alcohol that provides the excuse for 'uncontrolled' increases in retaliatory violence against women. This relationship between alcohol and violence is supported by a review of twenty Aboriginal women admitted to the hospital in

Broome following domestic violence. In all but one case, the assailant was the woman's partner and alcohol was involved in eighteen of the cases (Hunter 1983).

He goes on to argue that:

*Aboriginal male violence toward women, thus, represents a displacement of rage from the perceived oppression of a dominant and excluding culture, to the perceived beneficiaries intraculturally, encouraged and enabled by alcohol's brief, illusory empowerment (1983, p. 193).*

The dietary induced health problems, discussed earlier in this chapter, are exacerbated through behaviours associated with alcohol abuse and gambling. In addition to the excessive transport costs, high government taxes result in a significant premium on beer, the alcoholic beverage of first choice in those communities that allow drinking. This increases health problems, not only for the excessive drinker but also family members, as limited funds are appropriated from food. There are numerous complaints about children attempting to steal food from stores, while others treat themselves to diets of sweets and soft drink using money received from parents involved in either card games, alcoholic consumption, or both. Terry, one of the reformed Aboriginal male alcoholics speaks of these problems:

*We can see that it has that big effect on our communities. Some of these problems are like, kids going to school with no lunch money and some of them go to school a bit dirty, no clean clothes and kids going to different more families looking for food and maybe the dependent member spending a lot of money on booze and not buying any tucker, and all this sort of thing happen.*

Jean, one of the elder Aboriginal women at Lombadina, is also highly critical of the way women gamblers spend money to the detriment of their children's health. She comments:

*They are silly. They are free with giving the money to kids to buy things, if they want to buy Coca Cola. So that makes them suffer. Mother is not giving them enough proper food and not really a meal, putting their foot down on spending the money in the right way and getting what they want. They seem to be all drinking coke! coke! coke!*

Similar patterns of alcohol-related domestic violence and child neglect were reported in studies of American Indian and Inuit indigenous society (Kahn 1982). It is also interesting to note that much of the welfare money returns to the government through taxes, particularly on alcohol, and to local businesses supplying food and transport. There is much truth in commonly made Aboriginal claims that the economy of the Kimberley survives on Aboriginal welfare payments.

Prior to European settlement, the concept of illness, for most Aborigines, involved an act of intrusion by some person or thing as a consequence of actions within either the social or sacred domain. Such an intrusion represented either a meaningful experience or social status. Traditional healers, the *mabarn* man<sup>4</sup>, dealt with such illness through either sacred mediation or the use of traditional bush medicines (Hunter 1993). Traditional medicines included an infusion of antbed for the treatment of bowel problems and the crushing of green tree ants to release formic acid, which was inhaled, for respiratory problems. European settlers, however, perceived illness as disease and replaced traditional healing practices with curative medicines, usually undermining the power of the *mabarn* man in maintaining social cohesion. It must also be recognised that the World Health Organisation definition of health includes the complete state of physical, mental and social well being and not simply the absence of disease. This aside, bush medicines are still used in remote Aboriginal communities and many remedies are certainly known to the older people. Jean recounts the use of traditional medicines by her mother:

*Mum used to go to an hill and get dust from the ant hills and rub it in. Throw the sand away and put dust on, and then eat that and that stopped the diarrhoea. The other was a Scudi tree. It has red oil. For sores we wash in that and let it dry. They boil the water and they sort of bathe you with it and you stay in the sun and get dry... For toothaches we use gum trees. You see it has red gum, the pinkish colour the bark, it has little things like condys crystals. You just put a little bit on the tooth. There are other trees you get the roots off, you soak it in water and boil it. For aching bodies. Mum would always use it. You know the yellow fat of the turkey, they kept that and hang it up on a spear and the oil fall off and if people constipated they'd eat it.*

Sandy Paddy, a well known Lombadina elder, outlines a variety of conditions that can be treated by the corkwood tree, known in Bardi as 'bilangkamar':

*They used to put it in the fire until all that liquid stuff between the wood and the skin comes out, then you put it on sores, wash the sores in it. I think it is better if you put it on straight. For rheumatism you can also use the leaves, just put them on the fire, then put them on your rheumatism while they're warm... For snakebite you cut the place open and put it inside (Paddy, Paddy and Smith 1987).*

Not only bush medicines are remembered by the older people. Grace recounts her childhood lifestyle on Sunday Island, where her father had been a Bardi tribal lawman. She believes in the mystical power of healing:

*Its all mind over matter. When I was a young girl my grandfather healed me when I was sick. I didn't ever go to a doctor, a European doctor, to get medical treatment and I never got sick at all. The first time I entered hospital was when I had my eldest son and after that I never got sick. But now that I'm getting old and all these aches and pains are coming to me now, the Western people are telling me, you know, its stress.*

Hunter (1993) described an occasion where spirit healing was used by a *mabarn*<sup>4</sup> on a woman suffering deep grief at the loss of her daughter. The *mabarn* gave the cause as the girl's spirit hanging on from below. Hunter wrote:

*He described his treatment, through verbal and physical means, as taking the woman back down, so that the little girl could let go and allow the woman to come to the surface again. Little could be added by psychiatric expertise (1993, p. 55).*

Smoking is used ritually after both initiation and death, and therapeutically for the health of babies. In Kalumburu a house was smoked following the death of an old Aboriginal man. A semi-dried bunch of leaves was waved about through the house until smoke filled the inside and began to drift through the windows and doors. A group, mainly children, watched in relative quietness. Again, on a trip to an outstation that had been deserted for two years following a death, the site was ritually smoked. The four-wheel-drive vehicle was stopped about every kilometre and the owner of the property set fire to the dry grass, the fire spreading rapidly through the dry undergrowth. On arrival at the site of the house itself, scrub and undergrowth in the surrounding area was burnt with the smoke filling the house.

Informants also spoke of babies being smoked after crying all night or after being sick with diarrhoea. Phyllis Kaberry (1939) described the ritual of smoking babies in the Kimberley some fifty years ago:

*The umbilical cord was cut and the placenta was buried secretly. The baby was then dusted with charcoal, and string was tied around its wrists to strengthen them. It and the mother were rubbed with conkaberry bushes which had been smoked over a fire and which were applied to ease the pain, prevent bad after-effects and ensure a flow of milk (1939, p. 242).*

The resilience of traditional medicines throughout the Kimberley is possibly a reflection of the slow process of adaption as Aborigines from remote areas came only gradually under European influence. Infections still pose a severe threat to Aborigines in the Kimberley and, as recently as 1959, seventeen people died from a measles epidemic in one of the Bardi communities (Hunter 1993). During our field work, medical officers were investigating rumours of an HIV infection at one of the communities. While the report is confidential, the local clinic nurse talks of fear among medical authorities that AIDS could have devastating repercussions among the Aboriginal population of the Kimberleys. Similar fears are expressed by the health personnel at Wadeye.

#### 6.4 COMMUNITY CONTROLS

Each of the communities in this study recognises the problems of gambling and alcoholism and attempt, with varying degrees of success, to control the problems. Gambling is banned in Lombadina but is a major part of social life in the other communities studied. Interestingly, gambling is considered the major problem in Kalumburu, the only community where alcohol is totally banned. Control mechanisms adopted to resist alcohol abuse range from complete bans on consumption within the community, to banishment of drunks from the community. This minimises hours of alcohol sales and limits the amount of alcohol that may be purchased each day. The residual effect is that consumption is confined to reduced alcohol (3.5 percent) beer with an emphasis on the provision of rehabilitation programs.

The Aboriginal council at Kalumburu have imposed a complete ban on the consumption of alcohol within the community and banishment for any person who breaks this bylaw. Although outwardly successful, many informants speak of males, especially those winning substantial amounts in gambling games, chartering flights to Darwin to consume alcohol. This not only drains money from the

community but also removes males from the community. This community does have a disproportionate number of single women and children, with males, supposedly working nearby in larger regional towns where they can consume alcohol, being in prison for alcohol-related crimes or on a drinking binge. It seems that the alcohol problem has been exported while its local ramifications remain.

The Wadeye Aboriginal council has also banned the consumption of alcohol within the community but operates a social club that limits sales to four cans per day for two hours every day except Sunday. All alcohol must be consumed within the confines of the club and this is controlled by selling tickets to eligible drinkers. These are exchanged for cans. The controls are reasonably successful, although three associated problems have arisen.

Firstly, females give their cans to their males, thus encouraging rapid consumption within the time limit. Observations confirm this activity. Secondly, drinkers drive to communities where restrictions do not apply. This has resulted in alcohol related road accidents and even deaths among returning drinkers. Thirdly, the club closes for the three weeks of 'bush week' to support the policy of traditional hunting and gathering practices by families. Although there are a large number of problem drinkers, informants say that the draw of bush week is greater than alcohol. Colin, a thirty year old non-drinking Aboriginal artist, says:

*Some of them go across to Peperminatti. The community is not too far from here and they can get alcohol there. Or Daly River or some of them will just go the whole way down to Darwin for a couple of weeks. I don't think many of them go there instead of bush. The only reason is for the alcohol.*

Despite the four can and two hour time limit controls, drunkenness and violence still occur. In 1978, and again ten years later, the non-drinkers of Wadeye destroyed the club by driving a bulldozer through the building. While this was reported in local and national news as a riot, it is viewed very differently in



Wadeye, as Colin explains:

*If you read in the papers, riots and things, we say "What riot?" Someone's been making up stories. It's not true. When they broke into the club, they didn't hurt any white people. They pushed back the manager and they said "Look mate, we don't want to hurt you, we just want to stop this club from opening till we can sort out community problems because the alcoholics and the leaders couldn't make a strong decision about the young."*

This is confirmed by Sister Maureen from the mission. She had actually witnessed the destruction:

*If it was a riot you've got to have groups of angry people, haven't you? But nobody was angry at all. They threw the till out, they threw everything out, they smashed it anyway. They just threw everything out. And then of course the drinkers they smashed into the room that had the beer and everyone was running around with carts of it, wheelbarrows of beer, everything they could put it in, and running off and hiding it in all sorts of places.*

Each of the Bardi communities has different controls. Bylaws banning alcohol from the Djarindjin community are not enforced and, consequently, drunkenness and violence is experienced. Grace, the previous Djarindjin chairperson speaks of these problems:

*It's brought in. Anyone who goes that's got a vehicle comes back loaded. Some people bring it in and sell it. They actually barred one bloke from the community for selling drugs and alcohol, but it hasn't cut it out. So if they've got one person, somebody else's still going. In fact it's got to the kids now.*

Berty, a forty five year old Aboriginal man recounts how a police officer was brought out to help solve the community's alcohol problems:

*A sergeant of police. He came out here last year sometime and they set up rules and regulations which they set in place about alcohol being brought into the community and there was supposed to be no moselle, no hard core liquor. Well within twenty-four hours from leaving, which was a Friday, there was a party and a couple of fights and the policeman ended up being called out on the Sunday. So, it just goes to show you the sort of discipline and the amount of alcohol that does get brought in.*

Ben, the Chairman of Lombadina, believes that the problems faced by his neighbours are due to the lack of enforced controls. The council discourages alcohol but does not enforce the bylaws. He explains:

*They're not doing it. I don't know what the thing is. They started with a carton a week. Each person. Well, imagine a whole group with cartons. They got to sort it out. I think their bylaws are being put into place now. Once they say it. I mean a thousand times you say 'no grog here', you'll never stop it.*

The most successful controls are in Lombadina, where those who work thirty five hours per week on the local CDEP program are allowed up to five cans of reduced alcohol beer each weeknight. This is administered by Ben, the local chairman, and must be consumed within the confines of the social club. This control has been brought in to limit the amount and type of alcohol consumed. Ben tells of the rationale behind this decision:

*We decided to have a few cans of Gold like every night instead of bringing in the other stuff. A few bottles of wine and everybody would go crazy. Too sick to go to work. We can have five cans every night, even a bit more, and next day there's nothing wrong.*

Another control mechanism gaining popularity in each of the communities is the outstation movement where extended family groups move to tribal lands to escape the alcohol and gambling abuses of the larger community. These outstations also enable the power structure to be restored and allow older males to teach traditional practices to the children. They are not without their cost, however, as children are denied formal education skills and modern services are often severely restricted. Ben gives his views on the shortcomings of outstations:

*People don't realise it. Fair enough they want their place, I reckon they go back to their place fair enough, but to live there, what they going to do? They might as well stay here where you've got the power, you've got the hospital here, you've got the school there, you've got shops here, everything.*

At Wadeye, Colin believes the outstations will fail because they are treated like holiday homes while motor vehicles enable easy access in both directions. Terry is equally apprehensive:

*I think this is what Aboriginals really want, you know. Have some freedom out there in the bush, you know. But the only thing I'd miss in town maybe is TV and videos and ice cream and all these sort of things, you know.*

Grace speaks emotionally about her childhood on Sunday Island and about how the outstations will enable the revitalisation of cultural practices. One of the teachers at Djarindjin, however, has witnessed the movement to the outstations and believes they will fail when the lure of community goods and comforts becomes too strong. She states:

*They want their outstations, to move back out to the land and that, but they still want all the white things, like a generator, refrigerator, ghetto blasters, they want all that there as well. Even though they are moving back out there doesn't mean that they moving back. Like all the kids have got space games, Nintendo's, TV, they wouldn't go without their TV. So I can't see a*

*movement back toward traditional culture at all and that's what you sort of wonder as the generations move on. I am sure it will just slowly get left in a mess.*

In all but one of the communities, the abuses of alcohol and gambling are wreaking havoc on social structures, health and child nutrition. Unless strict controls are enforced, these communities face an uncertain future. While it appears that the outstation movement is providing temporary relief from the worst of community life, they seem destined to fall victim to the lures of modern consumer goods and services.

The lack of discipline among younger children was also voiced by a large number of informants. Daniel, a twenty year old non-Aboriginal man brought up in the Wadeye community, says:

*They just don't like being told what to do. That's the problem with schooling too. You try to get kids there but they don't like being in a confined space and being told you can't do that. For them its like we can do what we like. Its going to be very hard to stop it. The parents find it hard. They don't get too far trying to discipline the kids. They'll hit their mothers. Mothers will try to tell them not to do something. They will turn around and hit their mother, or swear, or pull their hair and run off. They don't like being told what to do.*

The chairman of Lombadina, however, thinks that discipline problems are caused by poor parental examples. He comments:

*I think they see how the adults carry on and they follow on. If people don't care, they don't care either. Have to give them a reminder every now and then and they come good. Even when the kids come up and throw a bit of paper or can, I make them pick them up and chuck it in the bin. That's the difference. Even though they walking back home across there ( Djarindjin). They see the adults don't do it, so they don't do it too see.*

Bruce also blames parental discipline and argues that it is alcohol abuse which causes poor upbringing:

*As an example, a packet of biscuits gets put on the table at what ever time, morning tea, lunch or whatever it might be. And the kids just eat, eat and eat. There is no "Right you have had one biscuit alright you go away." The kids eat and eat until all the biscuits are gone and you see when they're teenagers and so on, they get a carton of beer and they drink it until that cartons gone. They drink it until they drop or they drink it until the cartons gone.*

Bruce goes on to say that this neglect of discipline is compounded because the children are punished for the wrong thing. He states:

*Like the parents would belt their kids at the wrong times. They will belt their kids because they are annoying them. They want to play cards, the adults want to play cards and their kids are annoying them and then they whack them you know and the kids are annoying them because they are starving hungry and their parents aren't feeding them*

At Wadeye in particular, the knowledge and rituals of the older people are negated by their lack of power and by their almost total dismissal by the younger generation. However, Father Leary is quick to point out that this was also the case forty years ago and was not a great issue because it was corrected after initiation. The biggest problem he sees now at Wadeye is delinquency among the younger males, who have never been through bush initiation and have no respect for their elders. His comments after forty years of observing tradition oriented practices make a lot of sense:

*Until puberty the kids were absolutely indulged in. The kid wasn't corrected. You'd see a kid fall on the ground, two year old screaming and yelling till Mum picked it up and then hit Mum in the face. Mum would smile. So that went on but then the very cut off was when the kids were saying "Okay,*

*bush time". Three months in the bush and then that whole thing was, the pressure was on, even that sudden taking from the family was a shock to the system. And then out there just with the old men and the discipline. But now all those tantrums of pre-puberty go right on through teenage years, becoming more and more exaggerated. And the old people tell you, "We can't control our young people. They're getting too far away." They use that expression, 'too far away'. Some will even say they're frightened of their teenage boys. Teenage boys will demand money. Sad! And so that must be a great humiliation for the old people.*

This lack of discipline, says Father Leary, is not so much the lack of an initiation ceremony but the traditional practices that go with it. He says:

*Three months in the bush and they sat down with the old men and listened, and learnt about their law and respect and all that about breaking the law, supporting their families, then came back and there was the circumcision ceremony. Their ritual. Now they have the circumcision but no bush! So now discipline is dying down among the Aborigines and also the authority of the old people.*

This lack of respect is confirmed by an incident involving young male delinquents in Wadeye that a number of informants recounted. The elders had tried in vain to control car stealing and finally acted using public punishment to inflict shame. The boys were stripped, placed across a drum, and beaten across the buttocks in front of the community members. The delinquency stopped and considerable power was restored to the older generation. The art teacher recounts what he had been told by the Aboriginal artists:

*One of their ring leaders was quite a big bloke, in his mid twenties and ah, getting your pants pulled down and having your bare arse whipped in front of everyone if you're a twenty four year old, must have been hugely embarrassing and a shame job. So, I think the shame job aspect of it quietened things down more than the pain of getting smacked on the arse. And yeah nothing much has happened since then. But the kids themselves, the whipping doesn't stop them. There's been floggings in the past and it's just another initiation rite for these young people.*

## 6.5 SELF DEVELOPMENT

Much of the history of relationships between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people since occupation has involved control and power. The dominant non-Aboriginal society has controlled or, at the very least, strongly influenced firstly; Aboriginal consumption patterns through the control of food, housing and alcohol, and secondly; Aboriginal social structures, through education and health policy, law enforcement, settlement policies and the removal of children. Missions, pastoralists, mining companies and government policies have all had a profound impact upon contemporary Aboriginal societies. Despite the enormous impact of these agents on Aboriginal society during the last two hundred years, however, the welfare system implemented during the 1970s has arguably had an even greater impact.

Bruce recounts how his Aboriginal wife felt when she returned to the Djarindjin community ten years before, after completing her secondary schooling in Perth during the seventies:

*She was totally devastated by the change in the people because the welfare system had come in, unemployment benefits came in, people were sitting down and not having to work and their self esteem their personal presentation, their attitude to life had all gone backwards. They were not*

*happy people compared to their hard working happy selves and clean selves before. Just completely different, because of the handout system, the welfare mentality that this idea of working, was wrong chuck it out we will help you we will support you we will provide you with money you don't have to do anything.*

Ben is especially critical of the impact of the welfare system on Aboriginal communities, although he also believes this depends on how the community responds. He outlines what he believes is the problem with the neighbouring Djarindjin response:

*If you look at the other side now, that was going to all be run by Aboriginal people, but it's all Europeans still there. Administrators, mechanics, project officers, shop keepers and whatever. It's still the same. It's no different. Whether the Church had it or the outside people. But if you want to sit back and the money still going to come in, who wants to go to work?*

Father Leary agrees that the cash inflow from the welfare system results in more non-Aboriginal administrators who tell Aborigines how to live, placing yet another pressure on the community. He recounts the Aboriginal reaction to the introduction of the cash economy at Wadeye:

*I remember the first pay packet that came into the place. And I remember Harry Pulada, the bush carpenter, he called a meeting. I think he must have had a speaker system because I can remember his voice as clear as can be. He was a good talker and he said, "This is something very new. It's a new way of living". And they were all nodding, and he said, "It's not my way of living. My old way is to take my kids and teach them how to hunt and live in the country. But this is something new. From Monday to Friday no work and I get my tucker from this!" And he said, "I'm worried about all that. What if I leave my old way, where I know how to hunt and teach my kids to live in the*



*bush? I'm going to end up a non person, a nobody". Well I say three cheers for Harry!*

The social welfare system implemented by the government in rural Aboriginal Communities was designed to ensure cultural sensitivity, fairness and functionality. It was premised upon concepts of strong Aboriginal community affiliation and consensual decision making administered through an elected Aboriginal community council with non-Aboriginal administrative assistance. It was designed to enable community self development and ultimately self sufficiency. In the three communities studied, it has failed to achieve these aims and indeed has resulted in the introduction of new problems.

In each of the communities, affiliation and consensual decision-making are not forthcoming, especially as the communities are created entities rather than natural groupings. Kalumburu began as a combination of at least two distinct tribal groups; the Kwini and the Woonambal, each with different languages and cultures. Family rivalries continue to manifest themselves and I witnessed one incident involving the wielding of boomerangs and spears on my first visit to the community. The incident consisted of yelling abuse and posturing rather than violence but emotional conflict between the families was obvious. There is also a lack of community cohesion reflected in the rivalry between those families who remain attached and loyal to the mission and those who have placed their faith in the council.

At Wadeye, the situation is even more volatile, with eleven interacting tribal groups. Colin recounts the rivalries that have existed in the area even before the mission came in 1935:

*There was too much fighting and killing, one mob wiping out another mob. The problem was lots of men from this area were taken away, so the tribes round Daly and even way down to Victoria River thought, "Heh! All those mob are gone." So they started to come around here to try and steal women to*

*keep for wives and that caused a lot fighting. This mob were under siege over here and some of the old people said "Thank God the Missions came!" You could then get out of the bush and get out of the mangroves and you could live a decent sort of life.*

Father Leary, who first came to Wadeye some forty years before, speaks of the prevailing situation and concerns expressed by Stanner, the anthropologist who had spent many years working in this community:

*When I first came the two main groups never get on. I think it probably went back centuries with the Marringarr physically dictating the Murrinh-patha. I think raiding across the river here and taking their women. There was a real hatred and Stanner, Professor Stanner, told me once that he thought there'd be wholesale bloodshed between the two groups one day, especially when alcohol came.*

At Lombadina and Djarindjin, the situation is better in that the groups, by and large, have a single culture. However, sufficient division and disagreement exists within the community to result in a physical border between the groups. On one side of the fence, the council has failed to control daily problems, let alone the direction of development. As Jean says:

*Mind you they try to do something on that side to stop alcohol, they say you could only drink alcohol if they drink it in their own homes. If they could stick by what they say and you know, be strong enough to face the alcoholics and tell them, but they're not.*

Strong dictatorial control by the Chairman of Lombadina provided the possibility of successful economic development. At Lombadina, Albert explained the difference in management between the two communities:

*You've gotta have one boss and one boss only instead of on Djarindjin side you've got a committee of people. Now they say one thing and then they go and do another thing, so you can see the difference in running, you know. It's one boss and one boss only. You follow the rules of the community, the rules have been set down, or you get chucked out on your ear. Well not so much chucked out but punched out. Basil's law is rule.*

Poverty, unemployment and boredom are evident in all three of the communities, but probably worst in Wadeye, due to the larger numbers involved. Eric, the non-Aboriginal electrician who has worked in the community for seventeen years, speaks about the helplessness and lack of direction that has resulted from the lack of employment:

*I feel sorry for these young blokes because I work in their houses, and I've got to wake them up and get them out of bed at ten in the morning so I can fix the light on their fan and then, I was thinking about it, because some of them are good blokes. As kids they went out bush with me, and I look at their kids and I think to myself. What are they going to tell their kids when they grow up and they say "What did you do when you were a young bloke daddy?" "Oh, I watched TV, watched videos, slept all day, went to the club in the afternoon and once a fortnight I walked down the office and collected my money."*

Under the welfare system operating in all three communities, almost every person relies solely on government payments. At Wadeye, the CDEP system is being considered for implementation. Resistance to the introduction of CDEP includes arguments that the community is too big, that the handout mentality now prevails, that the will to work no longer exists for many, and that the scheme will be divisive unless all can work. Eric gives his views on CDEP:

*Trouble with CDEP is, we're too big they keep telling us, Port Keats is too big for CDEP, because we were trying to get it a couple of years ago and been refused. One of the blokes that came with me out bush on this trip, he's probably early twenties, he's never had a job, does nothing, he just sits at home, watches television, goes to the club and has his four beers. You just wonder at their motivation. It's not a wonder more of them aren't screwy. I mean, what a life really! They seem to be a very patient people, they can cope with lack of things to do, whereas white people get pretty edgy I suppose. We all like to have a purpose in life, have things to do.*

The size of the community, the ingrained culture of unemployment and dole handouts, and resistance from those under the continual influence of alcohol, make implementation of CDEP at Wadeye a difficult proposition. At Kalumburu, the CDEP is operational but the proportion of men living in the community is small, and most women prefer to receive child welfare and single mother pensions. In Djarindjin, there is resistance to working for the dole as people cannot see the advantage of spending thirty hours working for only slightly larger dole payments.

At Lombadina, however, the CDEP is accepted as a means of learning new skills and relearning old traditional skills, establishing pride in community and individual achievements and raising hopes for a better future. A number of community members express pride in what they have achieved without government handouts. They are attempting to implement commercial tourism and aquaculture ventures such as oyster farming. They are intent on maintaining control over community life regardless of these activities. Vicki, a thirty year old Aboriginal woman responsible for cooking the tourists' meals notes:

*We don't want them to run our way of life. You know, we don't want to be revolving around them. We want them to suit our, ourselves, our needs and stuff, like our timetable and things like that, so, that's why we've only got*

*four days a week, and we have a break in the middle, give us time to recuperate and get ready for the next lot. And also, we've got the community to work and operate so we need time for that, just the normal running of the community. And, so we can have our weekends to ourselves, cause we like to do our own fishing and camping trips. Basically we don't want to change our way of life just for the tourists.*

The main concerns expressed are the lack of skills and venture capital. Ben believes that some, like himself, have returned from the outside workforce with sufficient skills to administer development projects and that capital will eventuate as the projects succeed, although this will be a slow process. He says:

*It was pretty easy when I come back. I had a sense of business already and see how the contractors work, how the truckies themselves built themselves up. One truck or bloke with a crane. So it was worth working the hours to get somewhere. And here, I'm working for myself. My people, my community.*

Overall, the welfare system, with control through government funds, has replaced the missions and community development has been constrained. While ensuring the politically and socially requisite safety net, it also retains the status quo by removing any desire for change. This inherently disguises its own failures. The CDEP program, while successful in one community, is not the answer. It is either too early, too divisive, too discriminatory, too restrictive, too difficult to administer, or too late. This endemic welfare dependency in remote Australia is also of concern to Aboriginal spokesman Charles Perkins who wrote:

*We must throw of this yoke of welfare and the soul-destroying concept of welfare and the state of dependency which results from it. It is destroying us and will eventually do so completely (1991, p. 20).*

Despite warnings of the demise of Aboriginal culture, and indeed deliberate efforts to do so by missions, pastoralists and governments, there is little doubt that it has survived. Changed it certainly has, but like previous international examples, total cultural destruction is rare unless it involves total genocide, as occurred in Tasmania. What has been lost in the process, however, are many of the traditional practices and skills associated with tradition oriented lifestyle and these have been discussed earlier. Not only does the revitalisation of cultural traditions enable increased cultural pride, commodification of cultural practices provides opportunities for economic returns. For example, the global rise in the popularity of Aboriginal art has already resulted in significant monetary contributions to remote communities. Tourism ventures based upon traditional cultural practices are also in keeping with increased global demand and offer further possibilities.

## Endnotes

- 1 *Kuns* (or *cunce*) is the most widespread card game played in the Kimberleys. It comprises a maximum of eight players dealt five cards each (face cards are removed) with rotating dealership. Each player begins with an initial "fill in" to the pot of \$5 to \$10 and this may progress to \$100 by game's end. Side bets are also made between players. A winning hand is divisible by ten ('*kuns*') and if nobody has *kuns* then one with the largest leftover wins. eg. twenty six will beat thirty five but not eighteen. *Kuns* requires considerable skill. *Kunkan* (or *cuncan*) involves five players and resembles rummy. In this game winning is largely a matter of luck.
- 2 Robinson (1973) noted that the Bardi linked luck with the spirit world. Good luck was given by the *raiya* spirits while bad fortune was attributed to the *nari* spirits.

- 3 Aborigines could apply for citizenship that was identified by the carrying of a card. However, this citizenship was subject to meeting prohibitive conditions. These included the supplying of two references from reputable citizens certifying industrious habits; evidence that citizenship would be conducive to the applicant's welfare; and that the applicant was fluent in English, was of good reputation and not suffering from disease. Citizenship could be revoked for any offence including drunkenness.
- 4 Mabarn is the Aboriginal term for medicine man in the Kimberleys.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The concept of culture, the processes of ascribing meanings to consumer goods and the historical interpretation of factors leading to the emergence of consumer cultures in Europe, provide a basis for understanding emerging consumer cultures in remote Aboriginal communities of north-western Australia. While previous studies used European or American experiences to examine the rise of consumer culture in developing societies, it is becoming clear that unique historical and cultural factors cannot be ignored. Consumer cultures in the three remote Aboriginal communities of this study exemplify the impact and diversity that can be ascribed to these factors.

The historical studies discussed in chapter two indicate that the world's first sustained consumer culture emerged in England. However, the factors conducive to this occurrence were not necessarily identical to those in other European countries. Likewise, American consumer culture, considered by many to be the epitome of contemporary global consumer culture, emerged through a combination of internal



colonial conditions and external factors imported or imposed from Europe, in particular England. Cultural and historical differences between societies manifested themselves in differences between these emerging consumer cultures, although all displayed certain things in common. These included the emulation of clothing fashions; the ritual consumption of imported novelty goods such as tea, coffee, sugar and tobacco; and an unquenchable desire for other novel consumer goods. Examining both European and American developments enables a comparison with the emerging Aboriginal consumer cultures being studied.

Nor were the emerging consumer cultures of the eighteenth century an entirely European or American phenomenon. Historical evidence suggests that Asian societies were undergoing similar increases in the importance and widespread use of mass produced rather than locally produced goods in daily consumption. Indeed many of the consumer goods which fuelled European demand were sourced from Asia, particularly tea, coffee, cotton and china ware. The tobacco smoking of indigenous Americans also became fashionable within European society. Interestingly, tea, coffee, sugar and tobacco became the colonial staples that impacted most upon Aborigines.

While 'post-occupation' Aboriginal history is a recent innovation, enough information exists to provide a reasonable understanding of traditional social structures and daily consumption patterns in each of these communities prior to European contact. These were outlined in chapter three. In fact, older informants in each of the three communities described the tradition-oriented practices taught to them by parents who had lived during the period of initial contact in these regions. Also of importance in chapter three is the historical description of European attempts to destroy Aboriginal culture and impose European values that would Christianise and "civilise" the indigenous people. This is important because it enables a deeper appreciation of the durability of Aboriginal culture. In each of the

communities studied, however, the erosion of diverse Aboriginal cultural traditions and practices by unthinking and uncaring settlers and governments has not resulted in the wholesale destruction of Aboriginal culture predicted so often during the last one hundred years. Ironically these remote Aboriginal communities, originally established to marginalise Aborigines and enable missions to replace their 'inferior' religions and cultures, may prove to be the final bastions of a revitalised Aboriginal culture.

## 7.1 ABORIGINAL CONSUMER CULTURES

The objectives of this study were threefold. Firstly, to analyse the impact of material consumer goods introduced into remote Aboriginal society by a technically superior occupying people. Secondly, to develop an understanding of how imported consumer goods and imposed lifestyle changes led to the emergence of consumer cultures within three remote Aboriginal communities. And thirdly, to understand what the key features of these cultures are and how they differ from each other and from those which have emerged elsewhere.

The study considers the degree to which an increasingly materialistic, dominant culture erodes cultural values and practices and whether increased wealth leads to greater and more elaborate desires among Aboriginal consumers. It also endeavours to consider just how important factors such as emulation, envy provocation and status seeking are in these emerging consumer cultures. Finally, the study attempts to examine the degree of Aboriginal resistance to the hegemony associated with cultural globalisation.

It became increasingly clear in each of the three communities that global consumer culture and tradition-oriented Aboriginal cultures are not mutually exclusive. What has instead occurred is a complex syncretism involving, on the one hand, traditional practices and, on the other, a series of behaviours involving

adopted consumer goods. Traditional practices include the use of indigenous art, dance, music, ritual body decorations, food gathering and initiation ceremonies, often little changed since European settlement. Ironically these appear to have been either strengthened or revitalised through commercialisation, involving the commodification of Aboriginal cultural traditions for tourism and economic gain.

The adopted practices involve non-Aboriginal consumer goods including global brands such as Coca Cola, Reeboks and Sony; designer label clothing and American basketball inspired shirts; costumes and symbols associated with Australian national football teams; Hollywood television shows and popular music; and electronic goods such as television sets, VCRs, walkman radios, and guitars.

Others goods, such as motor vehicles and boats, spearguns, rifles and alcohol have been adapted to serve traditional practices and often reinforce and strengthen these practices. The four wheel drive, for example, has enabled easier and more constant access to extended families and tribal lands, as well as to outstations where traditional lifestyles may be followed. Likewise spearguns and rifles make traditional food supplies easier to obtain.

Even alcohol, which has caused immense problems for Aboriginal people since restrictions on its sale were lifted, has a positive side. Ironically, alcohol consumption practices provide social cohesiveness, particularly among males who have been marginalised and have lost self-esteem through the re-alignment of social power. Gambling has served a similar double-edged function, especially among women. In the emerging Aboriginal consumer cultures, alcohol and gambling have eroded cultural practices and alienated people yet have also enhanced the culturally inscribed sharing ethos and suppressed the envy provocation central to many other consumer cultures. Besides addictive gambling and alcohol, there is no evidence of consumers sacrificing perceived necessities for luxury goods as in Second and Third World societies. Addiction there may be, but not compulsiveness.

Finally, this syncretism has resulted in some goods being resisted because of non-compliance with Aboriginal cultural values. This is most evident with the resistance shown to goods inscribed with status enhancement as opposed to functionality. While motor vehicles enabling enhanced mobility are universally desired, those that provide status enhancement are rejected and individuals who possess them are often regarded with contempt.

Levels of poverty and marginalisation are arguably as bad in the three communities studied as in any contemporary Second or Third World developing societies. Despite this, these consumer cultures do not exhibit the frustrations or intense desires that Shultz, Ger and Belk (1994) reported among societies in the emerging eastern bloc countries, or that Belk (1988), Miller (1993) or Wilk (1995) reported among consumers in the developing Third World countries. Immediate gratification does appear to be greater and, given the similar poverty levels, is arguably culturally inscribed. What appears to be significantly different is the lack of an insatiable desire for luxury goods among the Aborigines.

The two strongest values central to Aboriginal consumer culture and not as evident elsewhere are non-possessiveness, perhaps culturally inscribed through the burden of possessions to nomadic people, and the sharing ethos, once essential for group survival within an uncertain environment. While the sharing of traditional foods still occurs, this has diminished following the widespread adoption of refrigerators. However, the lack of emotional attraction towards material possessions is evident in all the communities and the sharing ethos is exceptionally strong. Sharing is applied to alcohol, winnings from gambling, vehicles and VCRs by adults and by children to clothing, money and personal possessions. This degree of sharing has not been described in any of the literature on other consumer cultures and is antithetical to non-Aboriginal Australian consumption behaviour.

Neither does the modern hedonism identified by Campbell appear to exist in the three Aboriginal communities studied. While gambling, alcohol and televised football games provide emotional release and immediate gratification, daydreaming and pleasure seeking through consumer goods is not evident.

While the non-Aboriginal administrators and mission workers in each of these communities described the Aborigines in these communities as unable to budget money in even the most rudimentary way, they do in fact manage to do so when it comes to budgeting for alcohol consumption. The sharing practices can also be described as a basic form of budgeting and a powerful form of generalised reciprocity. These sharing practices have a powerful impact upon inhibiting envy provocation and the inscribing of status to consumer goods.

The welfare system, that was established to alleviate Aboriginal disadvantage, has resulted in new asymmetries that are further distorted by the limited resources available in remote communities. Aborigines in these communities are entrenched within this system and do not appear to have benefited economically. Real employment is virtually non-existent and discrimination, alcoholism, malnutrition, poverty, feelings of helplessness, and low self-esteem are common. While factors related to European occupation are partly responsible for alcohol abuse and gambling, factors associated with adverse social environments within the communities remain the major cause. These factors impact upon all consumption activities and, therefore, directly on the evolving consumer cultures.

In these economies of scarcity and deprivation, those involved with alcohol and gambling require more than their share of available money. The resultant appropriation of resources from sustenance and housing imposes additional social and economic burdens on others, in accordance with cultural expectations, to provide for neglected children. Health problems, nutritional deficiencies, as well as child and spousal abuse, are unfortunate consequences.

This situation is not unique to the remote Kimberley communities. It is representative of many indigenous populations suffering poverty and marginalisation because of economic and cultural domination by an occupying society. The consumption patterns of the Kimberley Aboriginal communities are not dissimilar to those of people living under conditions of poverty in developed and undeveloped parts of the world. What is different, however, is the response to consumer goods: food, clothing, housing and household goods, personal fashion items, television, weapons and motor vehicles. While diminishment of language, religion and custom may equate to cultural erosion, it does not constitute cultural destruction. Aboriginal culture has proven its resilience beyond doubt and continues to shape current behavioural patterns in these remote communities.

The evolving Aboriginal consumer cultures are far more strongly defined by their own cultures and tradition oriented practices than by imposed European values. Attitudes toward the consumption, possession and disposal of consumables, and the meanings attached to these goods, reflect cultural values involving immediate gratification, reciprocity, social responsibility, and the sharing ethos. Such cultural responses to, and ability to cope for, social and economic change involving consumer goods are unique to these remote Aboriginal communities.

The resurrection of ethnic identity, the assertion of cultural traditions and the confrontation between marginalised and dominated ethnic minorities and their national governments has increasingly become a global phenomenon over the last quarter of the twentieth century. Aboriginal Australia has recently followed this trend and the revitalisation of Aboriginal cultural traditions and practices is gaining prominence and has been aided by the success of Aboriginal art on the world scene, together with the tourist demand for commodification of cultural traditions. This process is evident in all three of the communities in this study.

## 7.2 LIMITATIONS TO FINDINGS

The limitations to this study through temporal restrictions and cultural inadequacies were outlined in Chapter Four. These have resulted in unanswered questions and, more importantly, in others of which the author is unaware. It will be left to researchers who follow to better appreciate such questions and hopefully suggest answers. However, in other respects this study provides a contribution to the growing literature on cross cultural understanding in consumer behaviour.

The history of contact between European and Aboriginal cultures has ignored the Aboriginal viewpoint until very recently. Likewise, the impact of imposed consumer goods upon Aboriginal people has been both recent and in most cases has taken a non-Aboriginal point of view. While the impact of imposed European consumer goods on Aboriginal health is well researched, this study has attempted to analyse the impact of cultural values, especially through consumer goods, upon the overall lifestyle of consumers in a unique cultural context. It also provides an account of the emergence of a Fourth World consumer culture subjected to historical and cultural impacts from European and then global forces. The study uses emic and etic data to provide a more balanced and more Aboriginal account of what has emerged.

While economic development and Aboriginal self determination were beyond the scope of this study, they are in many ways related to the emergence of consumer cultures in remote Aboriginal communities. For this reason, a brief analysis of the economic and social problems associated with economic and social development was discussed. While solutions to these problems are both outside the scope of the study and far too complex to be addressed within the limits of this study, issues relevant to consumption have been raised, and problems that require addressing discussed.

### 7.3 FURTHER RESEARCH

The historical development of local and global consumer societies is a relatively new field of research and the imposition of values and consumer goods from other societies is complex. This study has concentrated upon the importance of cultural values and practices to the emergence of consumer culture in three remote Aboriginal communities in Australia. There is ample opportunity to extend this study to other remote Aboriginal communities in Australia because of the wide diversity of historical and cultural traditions that exist. What is needed most of all is a far more concentrated study of Aboriginal consumer culture in one community and over an extended period of time. This could confirm whether traditional Aboriginal cultural values and practices are having a similar impact elsewhere. It would also be worthwhile to discover how strongly cultural values influence urban Aborigines whose cultural traditions have been almost completely eroded by their removal from traditional lands and elders and from tradition oriented experiences. How strong do cultural values remain following removal from a tradition oriented environment? And if the cultural values and traditions of urban Aboriginal groups have indeed been destroyed, is it possible for them to be revitalised outside their environmental context?

Contemporary mainstream Australian culture is different to the British culture from which it derived, and the American popular culture that dominates the contemporary electronic and print media in Australia. Given the multi-cultural impacts upon Australian culture during the last fifty years, it would also be of value to explore how Australian consumer culture differs between ethnic and age groups, especially given the dramatic social changes occurring in Australia over this time period. For that matter, how much does Australian and New Zealand consumer culture differ, given their common origins? And what about indigenous groups within New Zealand society who have been marginalised in a manner not dissimilar



to the Australian Aborigines, yet have vastly different cultural values and practices? It would seem that insufficient is known about emerging consumer cultures among marginalised peoples in developed and developing countries throughout the world, and this offers fertile ground for further research. Likewise, there are lessons to be learned regarding the influence of Second and Third world consumers upon consumption patterns in the developed world, as the recent monetary crisis in Asia indicates.

What can be learnt from emerging Aboriginal consumer cultures that is of benefit to mainstream Australia? Do perhaps the values of sharing and the denouncing of envy provocation and status-seeking through material goods represent ideals to which more fortunate others should perhaps aspire? And how should mainstream Australia tackle the problems which confront those marginalised outside the dominant society? How should Australian society approach the problems created through the two centuries of confrontation between European and Aboriginal cultures? All of these questions warrant further research.

And, finally, unlike the so called 'Western' consumer cultures that have emerged in most of the developed and developing world, these emerging Aboriginal consumer cultures display a strong desire for immediate gratification but do not use consumer goods for the purposes of social inclusion, status seeking or envy provocation. And, except for the addictive consumption of alcohol, tobacco and gambling activities, they do not exhibit insatiable desire or place the quest for consumer goods above other people or social well being. It seems that these significant differences may be attributed to culturally inscribed values, especially the strong sharing ethos and the lack of possessiveness. Just how powerful then are cultural values in comparison to the forces of globalisation? The findings of this study suggest that an homogenous global culture is by no means inevitable.

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# APPENDIX ONE

## RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

### STAGE ONE: PRELIMINARY KIMBERLEY VISIT

Date: December 1992

Sites: Kununurra, Warman, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Broome, Lombadina, Djarindjin and One Arm Point.

Participants:

RG Ron Groves, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University

KB Kim Bridge, MBA student of Aboriginal descent

NB Noel Bridge, MBA student of Aboriginal descent

### STAGE TWO: KIMBERLEY GROUP PROJECT

Date: July 1992

Sites: Broome, Lombadina, Djarindjin, One Arm Point, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Kununurra.

Participants:

RG Ron Groves, Project Coordinator, Edith Cowan University

RB Professor Russell Belk, University of Utah USA

RH Professor Ronald Hill, Villanova University USA

PO Professor Per Ostergaard, Odense University Denmark

RT Ray Thomas, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University

MM Martin McCarthy, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University

KB Kim Bridge, MBA student of Aboriginal descent

NB Noel Bridge, MBA student of Aboriginal descent

JT Judy Trend, MBA student, Edith Cowan University

DH Derek Holtzinger, MBA student Edith Cowan University

LR Lindsay Richards, undergraduate, Edith Cowan

JD Jane Davies, undergraduate, Edith Cowan University

CY Cheung Chow, undergraduate, Edith Cowan University

KH Kaylene Hughes, undergraduate, Edith Cowan University

**STAGE THREE: WADEYE AND THE DAMPIER AREA**

Date: February 1994

Sites: Kununurra, Wadeye, Broome, Lombadina, Djarindjin, and  
One Arm Point.

Participants:

RG Ron Groves, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University

MM Martin McCarthy, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University

**STAGE FOUR: KALUMBURU**

Date: April 1994

Sites: Kununurra, Kalumburu and Broome.

Participants:

RG Ron Groves, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University

MW Professor Melanie Wallendorf, University of Arizona USA

MM Martin McCarthy, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University

PG Patricia Guest, Graduate student, Edith Cowan University

**STAGE FIVE: WADEYE AND NGIUI**

Date: June 1994

Sites: Perth, Kununurra, Darwin, Ngiui and Wadeye.

Participants:

RG Ron Groves, Project Coordinator, Edith Cowan University

RB Professor Russell Belk, University of Utah USA

**STAGE SIX: KALUMBURU**

Date: December 1994

Sites: Kununurra and Kalumburu.

Participants:

RG Ron Groves, Project Coordinator, Edith Cowan University

MM Martin McCarthy, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University

**STAGE SEVEN: YIRKALA**

**Date:** June 1995

**Sites:** Kununurra and Yirkalla

**Participants:**

**RG** Ron Groves, Project Coordinator, Edith Cowan University

**RB** Professor Russell Belk, University of Utah USA

The group was accompanied by a three person professional camera crew from Edith Cowan University for Stage Two and Stage Seven.

## APPENDIX TWO

### DATA BASE USED

#### STAGE TWO: KIMBERLEY GROUP PROJECT

##### FIELD NOTES:

FRG	Ron Groves
FRB	Russell Belk
FMM	Martin McCarthy
FJD	Jane Davies
FDL	Derek Holtzinger and Lindsay Richards
GMK	Group Meeting Kooljabin
HC.117	Group meeting at Halls Creek July 11
HC.127	Group meeting at Halls Creek July 12

##### INTERVIEWS:

IRG	<b>Interviews by Ron Groves with</b>
IRG.Bas	Chairperson (AM 50), Lombadina July 3
IRG.Lis	Old lady (AF 60)at her home, Lombadina July 5
IRG.Bar	Worker (WM 35), Lombadina July 3
IRG.Mac	Administrator (WM 55), Waringarri July 12
IRG.Ted	Waringarri chairperson (AM 50), Kununurra July 12
IRG.Ang	Teacher (WF 30) Djarindjin July 3
IRG.Bel	Clinic sister at Djarindjin July 3

IMM	<b>Interviews by Martin McCarthy with:</b>
IMM.Tch	Two teachers (WF 28/30) One Arm Point July 2

<b>ILR</b>	<b>Interviews by Lindsay Richards with:</b>
ILR.Val	Kitchen worker (AF 35) Lombadina July 5
ILR.Geri	Worker (AF 40) Lombadina July 5
ILR.May	Young woman (AF25) Lombadina July 5
ILR.Pat	Young mother (AF30) Lombadina July 5
ILR.Vicki	Clinic Worker (AF 35) Djarindjin July 5
ICK.Sch	Discussion about learning at Djarindjin school

<b>IRB</b>	<b>Interviews by Russell Belk with:</b>
IRB.Mag	Administrators at Magaballa Books, Broome July 1
IRB.Kim	Kim Bridge at Kooljabin July 1
IRB.Ang	Worker (AM 35) at Lombadina July 3
IRB.Bar	Worker (WM 35) at Lombadina July 4
IRB.Sam	Worker (WM 45) at Lombadina workshop July 5
IRB.Bri	Worker making bowl (WM 45) at Lombadina July 5
IRB.Alb	Lithuanian worker (WM 50) at Lombadina July 5
IRB.Mary	Dancer's wife (AW 50) after dance at Lombadina July 6
IRB.Bak	The baker (WM 45) at Lombadina July 6
IRB.Con	Carlton Lodge Centenary concert excerpts July 10
IRB.Min	Worker at Kununurra (AM 50) July 12
IRB.Pad	Worker at Waringarri (AM 45) July 12
IRB.Sam	Worker (AF17) in Kununurra grocery store July 13
IRB.Pub	Waringarri workers (WM 45, WF 30) Kununurra July 13
IRB.Vic	Worker from Balgo (AM 45) at Kununurra July 13
IRB.Pay	Aboriginal (AF 45) at Waringarri on pay day July 14
IRB.Alc	Discussion on anti alcohol video Waringarri July 14
IRB.Alco	Alcohol video at medical centre Kununurra July 14
IRB.Jac	Corporation worker (AM 45) at Waringarri July 14
IRB.Wyn	Corporation worker (AM 45) at Waringarri July 15
IRB.Kev	Administrator of Waringarri Arts (WM 45) July 15
JRB.Lom	Belk journal notes on Lombadina

<b>IJD</b>	<b>Interviews by Derek Holtzinger with:</b>
IDH.Half	Worker (AM 60) Lombadina July 5
IDH.Luck	Dancer (AM 50) Lombadina July 6
ILR.Car	Administrator (AF50) Lombadina Office July 6

IJD	<b>Interviews by Jane Davies with:</b>
IJD.And	Worker (AM) at Djarindjin July 2
IJD.Eill	Ex chairperson (AF 55) Djarindjin July 3
IJD.Mya	Chairperson of Djarindjin (AF45) July 3
IJT.Red	Aboriginal woman from Red Hill

## VIDEO RECORDINGS

Video 1	Manager Magaballa Books Broome, July 1
Video 2	Belk with worker (AF35) at Magaballa Books, July 1
Video 3	Trend with manager (WM 45) Djarindjin Store July 2
Video 8	Davies with chairperson (AF 45) Djarindjin, July 2
Video 9	Belk with worker (AM 45) workshop Lombardina July 5
Video 11	Groves at house (AF 60) Lombadina July 5
Video 13	Richards with kitchenhand (AF 40) Lombadina July 5
Video 14	Thomas with chairperson (AM 55) Lombadina July 5
Video 16	Hughes with teacher (AF 45) One Arm Point July 6
Video 17	Ostergaard with male (AM 25) One Arm Point July 6
Video 18	Ostergaard with ex chairperson (AF 55) One Arm Point
Video 21	Group meeting at Fitzroy Hotel July 7
Video 23	Hill with Ernie Bridge (AM 50), Fitzroy Crossing, July
Video 24	Hill with chairperson (AM 35) Fitzroy Crossing, July
Video 29	Belk with Ernie Bridge (AM 50) at Kununurra July
Video 30	Belk with Kim Bridge at Kununurra July 11
Video 31	Belk with Noel Bridge at Kununurra July 12
Video 34	Thomas with policeman (WM45) Halls Creek July 12
Video 40	Groves with Chairperson (AM 50), Kununurra July 13
Video 41	Ostergaard with Noel Bridge (AM 28), Kununurra July 13

### STAGE THREE: WADEYE AND LOMBADINA

#### FIELD NOTES:

FRG            Ron Groves  
FMM            Martin McCarthy

### STAGE FOUR: KALUMBURU

#### FIELD NOTES:

FRG            Ron Groves  
FMW            Melanie Wallendorf  
FMM            Martin McCarthy  
FPG            Patricia Guest

### STAGE FIVE: NGIUI AND WADEYE

#### FIELD NOTES:

FRG            Ron Groves  
FRB            Russell Belk

#### INTERVIEWS:

IRG            **Interviews by Ron Groves with**  
IRG.Mat       Ex-resident (WM22) Wadeye June 24  
IRG.Ste       Artist (AM22) Wadeye June 24  
IRG.Lear       Catholic Father (WM65) Wadeye June 25  
IRG.Sis       Sisters (WF50,WF55) Wadeye June 26  
IRG.Art       Administrator (WM 30) of Adult Art Centre June28  
IRG.Croc       Electrician (WM 40), Wadeye June 29

IRB            **Interviews by Russell Belk with:**  
IRB.Ofc       Curator of W.A. Art Gallery, Perth June 17  
IRB.Lan       Doctor's art collecting wife (WF 28) Ngiui June 23  
IRB.Moi       Sister at Catholic mission (WF 55) Wadeye June 26

**VIDEO RECORDINGS**

- Video 1      Urban Aboriginal artist (AM 35) Perth June 18
- Video 2      Art curator (WM 45), Fremantle Art Centre June 20
- Video 3      Owner (WF 40), Aboriginal art gallery, Perth June 20
- Video 4      Curator (WM45) State Art Gallery, Perth June 30
- Video 5      Tour guide (WM 40) Tiwi tours, Ngiui June 23
- Video 6      Tour guide (WM 40) Tiwi museum, Ngiui June 23
- Video 7      Administrator (WF 40) Tiwi Designs, Ngiui June 24
- Video 8      Artist (AM 45) Tiwi Designs, Ngiui June 24
- Video 9      Artist (AM 45) Tiwi Designs, Ngiui June 24
- Video 10     Chairperson (AM 35) Wadeye June 28
- Video 11     Adult art manager (WM 35) Wadeye June 28
- Video 12     Father (WM65) Catholic Mission, Wadeye June 27
- Video 13     Artist ( AM 50) Wadeye June 28
- Video 14     Minister (AM 55), Catholic Mission, Wadeye June 28
- Video 15     Assistant, Artefact store, Darwin airport June 29
- Video 16     Curator (WF 40) State Art Gallery, Darwin June 30

**STAGE SIX:      KALUMBURU****FIELD NOTES:**

- FRG            Ron Groves
- FMM            Martin McCarthy

**STAGE SEVEN: KUNUNURRA AND YIRKALA****FIELD NOTES:**

- FRG            Ron Groves
- FRB            Russell Belk

**VIDEO RECORDINGS**

- Video 1      Art curator (AM 35) Yirkala June 18
- Video 2      Art curator (AM 35) Oenpelli June 18